Joint update to the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board on UNOPS organizational culture

Strengthening organizational culture and advancing a safe, value-driven environment with equal opportunities for all
December 2025

I.Introduction

1. In line with Executive Board decision 2025/4, this joint information note provides an update from UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS on their progress to strengthen organizational culture. The three agencies continue to advance efforts to foster safe, inclusive, value-driven and non-discriminatory workplaces that promote dignity, respect and equal opportunity for all personnel.

2. These efforts remain central to delivering on the organizations' strategic plans and advancing accountability, risk management, and protection from all forms of misconduct, including sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Guided by relevant results frameworks, culture and engagement surveys, and data-driven analysis, UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS continue to embed practices that foster positive and transformative workplace cultures that enable their people to deliver at their best. In doing so, the organizations continue to reinforce a culture that safeguards dignity and respect as well as drives innovation, continuous learning and collaboration, enabling stronger results and greater impact for the people they serve.

II. United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS) update on organizational culture

3. Culture transformation remains a central element of UNOPS' strategic direction and is closely linked to the organization's broader people-centred approaches guided by the Integrated People Strategy (IPS), and the roll-out of HR digital capabilities under the Programme Innovation and Digitalization (PID) programme. These elements together establish a coherent framework for strengthening leadership, accountability, and personnel experience across all duty stations.

4. UNOPS recognizes that organizational culture directly affects effective and efficient delivery of the 2026-2029 Strategic Plan, internal accountability, risk management, and the protection of personnel and beneficiaries from discrimination, exploitation, and abuse. In line with the United Nations values, the organization continued to embed the

UNOPS cultural aspiration, expectations for leadership behaviours, and principles of dignity and respect throughout policies, processes and daily managerial practices.

5. This document synthesizes results achieved, key findings from institutional assessments and surveys, and outlines measures for institutionalizing accountability metrics.

III. Progress on key deliverables under UNOPS Culture Workplan

6. The UNOPS culture transformation journey has successfully addressed five strategic focus areas, encompassing over 50 initiatives that are now either completed or integrated into the organization's long-term direction, aligning with the UNOPS Strategic Plan 2026–2029 to support delivery in an workplace with accountability and a safe, fair, positive, value-driven and high performing culture.

- **Tone from the top:** UNOPS completed all initiatives aimed at strengthening senior leadership alignment and reinforcing clear communication. The new Town hall formats improved leadership communication channels, and strengthened engagement with Regional Directors are fully operational. Medium-term work on performance compacts is progressing as planned and will be finalized through the 2025 annual review cycle, including the development of indicators for 2026–2029 results framework.

- **Accountability:** Substantial progress has been achieved in strengthening accountability systems. Following the launch of the first Code of Ethics and the Integrity Portal in January 2025, the Ethics Office has strengthened its presence providing accessible information and guidance on ethical practices. Over 2,650 colleagues have participated in Ethics Dialogues, creating spaces to discuss ethical dilemmas, bias, and reinforce ethical decision-making, and foster a culture of open communication. The review of the Delegation of Authority (DoA) Framework has been completed, and ongoing work on leadership competencies will now be concluded within the IPS. Leadership accountability is reinforced through mandatory annual 360° assessments for all eligible leaders, including the Management Team. These assessments measure alignment with desired norms and behaviors, feeding into learning plans, coaching, and performance outcomes. Linking People and Culture objectives and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) targets to performance evaluations, UNOPS ensures leaders are accountable for modeling ethical, inclusive, and responsible behaviors.

- **Transparency and communication:** Dialogue mechanisms have been improved to ensure personnel feel informed, heard and actively involved in shaping their workplace experience. The Culture Ambassadors supported safe and inclusive culture dialogues, helping teams interpret 2024 Culture and Engagement survey results and translate them into over 200 team-level action plans. In parallel, engagement with Personnel Associations (PA) has deepened across regions in a structured manner, creating additional channels for personnel to voice their

feedback. Through quarterly Global Personnel Association Forum meetings, ad-hoc sessions, and a dedicated Community of Practice for Personnel Associations, fruitful discussions have surfaced cross-cutting concerns and strengthened personnel understanding of organisational initiatives.

- **Investment in people:** Most initiatives in this area have been finalized, including significant modernization of UNOPS people systems and revised policies to strengthen fairness, transparency and cultural expectations across personnel life-cycles. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts include reinstating the DEI Advisory Panel, launching a first ever DEI e-learning curricula, promoting workplace adjustment guidelines, and enhancing the influence of Employee Resource Groups. Key areas such as PSEAH, victim support, internal grievances, and employee engagement have been strengthened through mandatory training, action plans, risk mitigation, and a global referral directory. Leadership capacity is being built through competency assessments, targeted development programs, and upcoming executive certification. To further enhance agility and equitable access to opportunities, UNOPS has developed a global mobility framework, with implementation planned for 2026–2027. Work underway on the Talent Acquisition and Outreach (TAO), and the People, Planning and Performance (PPP) strategies, coupled with key people policies continues in 2026 as part of the Integrated People Strategy (IPS) delivery. All key initiatives are now anchored in the IPS, providing sustained support for UNOPS' cultural aspirations and helping build a more agile, creative and adaptive workforce, better equipped to deliver for partners and advance the ambitions of the UNOPS Strategic Plan.

- **Future-proof culture:** Foundational work in defining UNOPS' cultural aspirations, desired behaviours, and measurement approach has been completed. The annual Culture and Engagement Survey is now firmly established as the organization's primary measurement tool. Ongoing work, including alignment of leadership competencies, inclusive recognition systems, and addressing underperformance, is now consolidated under the PPP philosophy and will be finalized through the IPS work streams.

IV. Advancing organizational culture under the Integrated People Strategy (IPS)

7. With the foundational roadmap actions largely completed, UNOPS has transitioned from an initiative-based culture programme to a systemic, organization-wide integration of culture through the IPS. This shift calls for culture to be embedded in leadership behaviours, accountability systems, talent processes, digitalisation efforts, and day-to-day managerial practice.

8. The IPS provides the long-term structure to sustain culture progress by linking cultural aspirations to:

- ○ The PPP philosophy, which positions people-leadership behaviour, inclusion, fairness, and accountability as core to performance;

- ○ The TAO philosophy, which ensures fairness, transparency, and consistency throughout the recruitment lifecycle;

- ○ People policy modernisation, ensuring that all people processes reflect UN values, promote integrity, and reduce bias;

- ○ Digital People transformation, notably the new recruitment and onboarding system and other digital capabilities which will improve consistency of decision-making, enhance transparency, provide visibility on development and mobility opportunities, and reinforce equitable access to roles.

9. These advances ensure that the culture work initiated under the roadmap is not only sustained but strengthened, with digitalisation, policy reform, and leadership development serving as the primary enablers of a safe, accountable, inclusive, and high-performing culture.

V. Strengthening people management and leadership capabilities

10. UNOPS is making strides in strengthening people-management and leadership capability across the organization, recognizing that inclusive, accountable and respectful leadership is essential to creating a safe, fair and thriving culture.

11. The foundation of strengthened people management rests on the People Planning and Performance (PPP) philosophy, which embeds inclusive and accountable leadership into core organizational expectations. Managers are formally assessed not only on strategic results ("what" they deliver) but also on respectful conduct and team support ("how" they lead).

12. This behavioral assessment is rigorously reinforced by mandatory 360-degree feedback for eligible leaders, directly linking individual performance to cultural expectations.

13. UNOPS also expanded its learning offering with practical, targeted tools for managers in order to build the skills needed to meet these expectations. Capacity-building initiatives, including workshops on effective feedback, coaching-style conversations, and performance and feedback culture, were piloted across multiple offices with strong engagement.

14. Organization-wide training on performance conversations, appraisals and mid-year reviews reached personnel across regions, languages and time zones, while new and updated learning materials reinforce continuous learning as an investment.

15. Peer Calibration reviews, currently being piloted in offices globally, is a key managerial mechanism aimed at strengthening fairness, equity, and accuracy in performance assessments by requiring managers to collectively align evaluation standards, thereby

reinforcing accountability and psychological safety within the evolving organizational culture.

16. Inclusive leadership workshops on identity-based bias, allyship and respectful communication further support managers in applying inclusive and psychologically safe practices in daily team interactions.

17. A forthcoming Leadership Excellence Certification developed in partnership with a leading business school will launch in 2026 for the Global Leadership Network (GLN) which includes Regional and Country Directors, Programme and Support Heads, senior HQ leaders, operational managers, and the UNOPS Management Team (MT). The programme is grounded in UNOPS Culture Statements, institutionalizing a development pathway that directly addresses competency gaps identified through feedback mechanisms.

18. Concurrently, UNOPS' new Global Mobility Framework, anchored as a key priority under the IPS, is an essential framework for enhancing organizational agility and strengthening the leadership succession pipeline by ensuring equitable access to developmental and rotational opportunities across diverse functions and duty stations.

19. The Global Mobility Framework directly supports the delivery for partners in line with the 2026–2029 Strategic Plan. While it plays a critical role in developing agile leadership capabilities, particularly within GLN, which will be prioritized in its implementation in 2026, it will also expand transferable skills and cross-functional experience across the wider workforce, preparing talent well before they assume managerial and senior leadership roles.

20. The rollout of Talent+, the new recruitment and onboarding system, not only modernises recruitment, rostering and mobility, it directly impacts people management processes and practices. By requiring managers to engage more actively with structured assessments, transparent processes and evidence-based decisions, Talent+ strengthens managers' accountability and deepens their partnership with People and Culture Group.

21. UNOPS has also reinforced its accountability systems to ensure fair and non-discriminatory people management. A strengthened performance rebuttal mechanism promotes procedural fairness and bias mitigation, while a proactive early-engagement approach encourages managers to address emerging performance concerns constructively before they escalate. All people management processes, including recruitment, performance, mobility and development, are now aligned with clear behavioural standards reflecting UNOPS' culture aspirations, DEI commitments and anti-discrimination expectations.

22. Culture and Engagement Survey results and the support of Culture Ambassadors now provide managers with structured team-level insights on trust, inclusion and

psychological safety, enabling more responsive and evidence-informed leadership. Teams that engaged in meaningful dialogue led by their managers demonstrated improved engagement and stronger perceptions of psychological safety.

23. Complementary initiatives including Ethics Dialogues and Open Dialogue sessions further equip managers to model UN values and UNOPS desired cultural behaviours, and foster open communication and strengthen respectful, inclusive team cultures.

VI. Progress on treating personnel with dignity, respect and eliminating discrimination

24. UNOPS continues to strengthen an organizational culture grounded in dignity, respect, non-discrimination and United Nations values across all HR-systems.

25. In 2025, UNOPS advanced a set of institutional, cultural and operational measures designed to prevent discrimination, including racism and racial discrimination, while ensuring fair treatment, accountability, and meaningful avenues for personnel to raise concerns safely.

26. The actions undertaken in 2025 combine policy reform, enhanced accountability mechanisms, targeted learning, equitable employment measures, data-driven analysis and system-wide collaboration.

27. The new Talent Acquisition Policy establishes fairness, transparency and explicit safeguards against bias at every stage of recruitment, including specific provisions for geographic and racial diversity.

28. The People Planning and Performance philosophy links inclusive leadership behaviours to performance expectations; mandatory 360-degree feedback for eligible leaders operationalizes this link.

29. In parallel, the organization enhanced safe reporting and protection systems by applying the Whistleblower Protection Policy to all discrimination-related allegations, strengthening anti-retaliation safeguards. Launch of the Code of Ethics and the Integrity Portal, offers user-friendly channels for confidential reporting and guidance.

30. UNOPS further reinforced system-wide accountability by joining UN ClearCheck 2.0, which now records substantiated cases of racism and racial discrimination across the UN system.

31. Substantial progress in strengthening preventive and response mechanisms, particularly concerning PSEAH, was achieved during the reporting period. All regions attained 100% completion of required PSEAH action plans by the end of Q3 2025. Mandatory online SEA training is maintained as an ongoing requirement for all personnel. The effectiveness of these enhanced safeguards is reflected in the decline of reported cases, with Sexual Harassment and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse cases decreasing by 29% in Q3 2025 compared to the preceding quarter.

32. UNOPS simultaneously ensured the full integration of PSEAH risk mitigation into project planning, with a harmonized approach to risk management.

33. UNOPS implemented extensive learning and engagement initiatives to deepen awareness of discrimination, bias and identity dynamics across diverse contexts. A comprehensive DEI e-learning course, including an anti-racism pathway, achieved a 95 % "good/excellent" rating among participants and became one of the most accessed trainings on the UNOPS Learning Zone

34. Regular Ethics Dialogues, Open Dialogue sessions, and regional learning challenges create safe spaces to discuss ethical dilemmas, bias, identity, and inclusion.

35. Regional Resource Labs, notably the Latin America Caribbean hub, have facilitated contextualised peer exchange and reinforced psychological safety across functions and identity groups.

36. To expand equitable access to employment, Temporary Special Measures were piloted in Latin America and the Caribbean to address barriers faced by under-represented racial and ethnic groups; global guidance issued in 2025 ensures consistent, context-sensitive application.

37. Equity considerations were also embedded into strategic workforce planning and draft restructuring guidance through a "need–risk–dignity" lens, ensuring potential impacts of organizational change are assessed transparently and with attention to representation, geographical diversity, and identity dynamics.

38. Voluntary racial and ethnic self-identification have been introduced in the Culture and Engagement Survey, the Exit Survey and, through Talent+, the new digital platform for recruitment and onboarding.

39. Findings from the 2024 Culture and Engagement Survey revealed differing experiences of inclusion and psychological safety across identity groups, leading to targeted training in selected country offices. These lessons are now being integrated into further analysis of the 2025 Culture and Engagement Survey and translated into tailored recommendations and actions.

40. Culture Ambassadors also play a key role in supporting managers facilitating inclusive and psychologically safe team discussions, turning the 2024 survey insights into practical, team-level actions that strengthen collective ownership of culture change.

41. UNOPS recognizes that progress against racism and racial discrimination within the UN system depends on collective, coordinated action rather than isolated initiatives. This is why UNOPS continues to advance UN system-wide efforts on equality, inclusion and integrity through active engagement in CEB/HLCM frameworks and their gender and disability sub-working groups, contributing operational insights that shape realistic indicators and harmonized data standards, including on racial and ethnic identities.

42. Collaboration with peer entities such as UNDP and UNFPA has been strengthened through joint learning initiatives most notably the 2024 Joint Staff Council Learning Series which built shared understanding and practical approaches to addressing systemic barriers.

43. These collective contributions demonstrate UNOPS' commitment to a one-UN approach grounded in shared standards, mutual learning and strengthened integrity across the United Nations system.

VII. Measuring culture and engagement progress

44. The Culture and Engagement survey introduced in 2024 continues to provide a robust and reliable measurement of behavioural change progress across UNOPS towards the desired culture aspiration and on personnel engagement.

45. The 2025 Culture and Engagement survey, achieved a record 75% participation rate within two weeks. This indicates growing confidence in using the survey as a credible tool to provide feedback but also set expectations in terms of personnel wanting to be heard.

46. The results confirm both engagement and overall satisfaction have steady improvement since 2024. Results confirm several positive trends in terms of Culture Index, including strengthened candor, improved psychological safety in many teams, and improved trust in local leadership.

47. The Culture Index was developed last year based on UNOPS' Culture Statements and serves as a consolidated measure of the desired behaviours for leaders as well as personnel. It brings together key indicators linked to trust, respect, honest dialogue, collaboration across teams, and striving for excellence, while also capturing elements of inclusion, feedback, and ethical conduct. Together, these provide a holistic view of cultural health and help track progress over time.

48. Survey findings also reaffirm the central role of the manager in shaping the everyday personnel experience. Teams who strongly agree that their manager fosters trust and open communication achieve engagement levels comparable to global best practice. Even slight decreases in this perception correspond with noticeably lower engagement, and when personnel do not feel their manager creates such an environment, engagement declines sharply. This pattern underscores that strengthening managerial capability particularly in feedback, coaching, recognition and day-to-day people leadership remains one of the most effective drivers for improving personnel engagement and experience.

49. At the same time, this year's results highlight areas requiring continued attention. Experiences vary significantly across teams and duty stations: while many teams show excellent outcomes across all engagement and culture indicators, others face persistent challenges in psychological safety, development conversations and recognition. These

variations confirm that culture is deeply local and that culture activation must continue to be anchored in all people processes, systems at the team level. Encouragingly, many teams with lower scores in the previous cycle improved markedly this year, showing that progress is strongest where managers and teams engage openly with results and have safe meaningful dialogues.

50. Survey feedback also points to opportunities to strengthen follow-up practices. While a portion of personnel report constructive action planning, others note limited visibility of follow-up or uncertainty about whether actions translated into meaningful change. Teams reporting effective action planning show clear improvements in engagement, whereas those with limited or no follow-up see declines. This reinforces the need for greater consistency in how managers lead post-survey discussions and the importance of embedding these practices into broader accountability mechanisms, and people processes, including support from Culture Ambassadors and alignment with the annual performance evaluation review cycle, aligned with established people management objectives and management goals.

51. Finally, the data reveal mixed perceptions regarding the ability to raise concerns safely. While trust in local leadership continues to strengthen, confidence in using newly developed speak-up mechanisms remains uneven across regions. Although mechanisms, systems, processes, and safeguards are in place, awareness and trust in these mechanisms must continue to be reinforced so that personnel feel fully empowered to voice concerns without negative consequences.

52. Taken together, these insights demonstrate both encouraging momentum and clear opportunities for continued focus. As UNOPS moves towards building the culture needed for the next decade of impact that enables delivery, the priority is now to deepen managerial capabilities, strengthen team-level follow-through and reinforce trust in speak-up systems.

VIII. Areas for improvements

53. Despite clear progress, the 2025 Culture and Engagement survey results highlight areas that require sustained attention:

    ○ Psychological safety and confidence in speaking up remain uneven across regions and identity groups, indicating the need to further strengthen trust in reporting and support mechanisms.

    ○ Gaps persist in accountability and transparency, with personnel calling for more consistent follow-through on cultural commitments and clearer and transparent communication on decisions that affect teams.

    ○ Leadership effectiveness continues to be a defining factor in achieving the desired cultural change: teams with weaker perceptions of managerial support, fairness and feedback report significantly lower engagement and psychological safety. The current investment in people management capabilities, stronger

follow-up mechanisms, and sustained organizational discipline will ensure that culture expectations are translated into daily behaviours at all levels.

54. Guided by feedback from managers, leaders, Culture Ambassadors and personnel, the Culture Ambassador mandate has been expanded and supported by a new regional structure with Culture Leads, giving offices greater ability to tailor actions to local contexts while staying aligned with UN values and UNOPS cultural norms.

55. Working closely with the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and the Ethics Office team, Culture Ambassadors now play a central role in modelling inclusive, ethical leadership and facilitating regular team discussions that build psychological safety and translate survey insights into concrete behavioural improvements.

56. This integrated and systemic approach ensures that culture discussions are not ad-hoc, but embedded as a regular practice in how teams reflect, learn and act on their results to bring effective cultural change.

57. By institutionalizing these mechanisms, UNOPS is building the day-to-day habits, leadership capability and organizational discipline needed to translate measurement into action and maintain momentum in its next phase of culture transformation.

IX. Sustaining and advancing culture through 2026-2029

58. As UNOPS enters the 2026–2029 Strategic Plan cycle, our ongoing culture journey has moved from a transformation initiative to the organisation's operating system. Through the Integrated People Strategy, UNOPS remains committed to reinforcing a forward-thinking and ethical organisational culture characterised by agility, creativity, learning and adaptability, one that upholds UN values while responding effectively to partners' demands for implementation services.

59. The adoption of the new UNOPS DEI Strategy in 2026 will further strengthen this foundation by providing a comprehensive roadmap for addressing racism and racial discrimination, ensuring that equity and inclusion are fully embedded in organisational practices.

60. The strategy includes a dedicated Anti-Racism Action Plan with defined objectives, activities, milestones, and clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to track progress across leadership accountability, policy, systems, and workforce representation.

61. Digital transformation is a key enabler of this shift. By Q3 2026, this will expand into a full Internal Talent Marketplace, strengthening a culture of development and mobility. By Q4 2027, a digital Performance Management system will complete the ecosystem, integrating 360° feedback, behavioural insights and continuous learning in one seamless digital experience.

62. This integrated alignment of culture, people policies, systems and digital tools represents a decisive shift: culture is no longer upheld by individual initiatives, it is enabled by a coherent, organisation-wide system designed to sustain the behaviours and capabilities needed to deliver the 2026–2029 Strategic Plan.

X. Conclusion

63. UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS continue to progress implementation of efforts to strengthen organizational culture in line with Executive Board decision 2025/4, by fostering safe, values-driven workplaces that uphold dignity, respect and equal opportunities for all personnel. Each organization has advanced initiatives focused on leadership, accountability, employee engagement, learning, and well-being, recognizing that a strong culture underpins effective delivery of their strategic plans.

64. Guided by the Board's encouragement, the organizations are integrating measurable approaches to cultural transformation through data-driven assessments, engagement surveys and the development of results frameworks and targets. These efforts are helping to identify progress, challenges and opportunities to further embed inclusion, accountability, and respect in everyday practices and management systems.

65. Collectively, these actions demonstrate the sustained dedication of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS to a healthy, inclusive and high-performing organizational culture. Continued attention to develop leadership and people management capabilities, learning and accountability will ensure that personnel across all levels can contribute to a respectful, empowering, and values-based workplace environment.

66. UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS remain committed to strengthening collaboration and advancing good practices across the UN system to reinforce prevention of discrimination, harassment and abuse of authority, and sustaining a shared culture of integrity and respect.