

HQ Optimization and the UNFPA normative role

HQ Optimization: Background

As the Executive Board-approved UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022–2025 stresses, transforming the world also requires reinvigorating and transforming UNFPA, in line with the United Nations reform. The landscape UNFPA operates in is changing rapidly – with climate change, demographic shifts, growing inequalities, and technological advancements reshaping the world. UNFPA has a choice: be swept along by the change happening all around us or become the drivers of our future.

In this context, the following two organizational changes are to take place as part of the UNFPA Headquarters Optimization initiative:

- the integration of the current Policy and Strategy Division and the current Technical Division into a Programme Division largely based in Nairobi;
- the relocation of the Independent Evaluation Office to Nairobi.

UNFPA expects significant benefits from the integration of its technical and programme functions as well as the relocation of these functions – together with the evaluation function – to Nairobi, an important hub in the Global South.

The **benefits from the integration** of UNFPA technical and programme functions and the new organizational structure include:

- enhanced support to country and regional offices through better inclusion of thematic inputs at all stages of the programme cycle;
- improved generation and dissemination of coordinated programming guidance and technical knowledge;
- more integrated family planning, maternal health and gender-based violence services to the last mile for communities that need our expertise the most;
- linked-up strategic planning, programming and technical support;
- more effective positioning of ICPD priorities; and
- alignment with arrangements adopted by other UN agencies.

The **relocation** to Nairobi will ensure that the integrated programme and technical functions, as well as the evaluation function, will be closer to more regions – in terms of geography or time zone – and that presence will be strengthened where the need is the highest. Synergies with other UN agencies and recurrent savings add to the foreseen benefits of the relocation.

It is worth noting that the foreseen arrangement, rather than being a mere “lift and shift” of functions, will entail a new, future-fit structure, designed and configured based on analyses and staff input to ensure enhanced organizational performance. In light of this, the Programme Division will start operating in New York as of August 2024 thereby allowing the necessary time for the structure and the processes to be fine-tuned if needed, as well as for staff to cohere as part of a new organizational entity, ahead of the phased relocation to Nairobi, which will start in March 2025.

How will the new organizational arrangement strengthen UNFPA normative role?

UNFPA takes its normative role very seriously in line with its decades-long commitment to advancing rights and choices and the ICPD Programme of Action. UNFPA plays a critical normative role at the country, regional, and global level, primarily focusing on areas related to sexual and reproductive health

and rights, gender equality, and population dynamics. This normative role has taken on additional importance at a time when there is pushback against hard-won gains on women's rights.

The recent Mid-Term Review of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025 places additional emphasis on the importance of this role and prioritizes it as a key driver to accelerate progress toward the three transformative results and the ICPD Programme of Action.

The organizational changes currently implemented in the context of the HQ Optimization initiative reflect this prioritization. They aim at **strengthening the key normative role** performed by UNFPA country and regional offices while ensuring continued engagement and presence in the global norm-setting processes in New York, in recognition of the fact that the strength of the UNFPA normative role depends not only on Headquarters-based functions but also on functions performed at country and regional level.

Indeed, moving these Headquarters functions to Nairobi is expected to strengthen the linkages between global norm setting and action on the ground.

The organizational arrangement resulting from the HQ Optimization – and in particular the establishment of a new Programme Division with integrated programme and technical function, enhanced capacities and closer proximity to more regions – is expected to **more effectively support country and regional offices** in their normative role through:

- o the provision of *more integrated normative guidance, technical support and policy advice* to country and regional offices, including during the development of country programmes;
- o *more effective and efficient provision of technical assistance and capacity building support* to governments, regional institutions and civil society groups in developing and implementing national population and sexual and reproductive health policies and programmes;
- o *enhanced investment in knowledge-management* which will result in more effective generation and dissemination of knowledge, data, and global guidance on sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence issues, and demographic developments, and support effective national or regional application of that knowledge for high-quality programming;
- o *a new team focusing specifically on data and analytics*, which, in line with the Strategic Plan 2022 -2025 and its Mid-Term Review, will ensure that UNFPA normative functions can be more evidence-based and can support data-driven insights and informed decision-making;
- o *integrated family planning, maternal health and gender-based violence thematic teams* will strengthen technical support in the substantive areas of the UNFPA mandate to ensure UNFPA thought leadership and advocacy;
- o *more efficient response* to requests for support in integrating and adapting intergovernmental decisions and instruments into policies and development plans;
- o *more effective South-South and Triangular Cooperation*, by having the functions located in the Global South, *and more effective support to cooperation with regional institutions*, including by fostering policy dialogue and knowledge exchange to promote best practices and lessons learned.

The country and regional level strengthening resulting from these enhancements is especially important to provide requested support at those levels to promote rights and choices and to leave no one behind.

At the same time, the organizational changes have been designed to ensure the organization's **continued strong global normative role**, including by ensuring UNFPA continued robust presence and engagement in New York as an important hub for global norm setting.

To this end, the **Intergovernmental, Interagency and Policy Dialogue Branch, responsible for advancing the UNFPA normative positioning in global intergovernmental and inter-agency fora, will remain in New York**. The Branch will be integrated into the Division of Communications and Strategic Partnerships (which will be renamed as the Division for External Relations) as of 1 August 2024. To support the UNFPA normative work, the Branch will continue to:

- o *position the UNFPA mandate in intergovernmental and inter-agency processes*, including by leveraging data, evidence, and technical expertise in support of sustainable development;
- o *support intergovernmental and interagency processes and partnerships*;
- o *coordinate UNFPA participation in UN reform and system-wide coherence agendas*.

The Intergovernmental, Interagency and Policy Dialogue Branch will work in close collaboration with a **new Programme Liaison Branch which will be based in New York** while functionally being part of the new Programme Division. The Branch will be headed at a senior level and will encompass programmatic and thematic expertise. To support the UNFPA normative work, the new Programme Liaison Branch will:

- o *perform New York-dependent technical and representational functions*;
- o *ensure political and country programme liaison* with Member State missions in New York;
- o *ensure timely provision of technical support* to engagements of the Office of the Executive Director and other units in New York;
- o *work in close collaboration with other organizational units in New York* to support engagement with Member States, UN agencies, and other global actors and stakeholders.

Further, the engagement of UNFPA in intergovernmental and interagency processes will continue to also be supported by **UNFPA senior management and the Executive Board Branch, which will also remain in New York**.

It is also important to stress that, as part of the reviews leading to this initiative, staff were specifically asked to quantify the amount of time spent working with stakeholders in New York versus non-New York-based stakeholders. These data fed into the decision of relocating the technical, programme and evaluation functions. **Staff engaged primarily in normative issues at the global level will continue to remain in New York**.