

UNAIDS Secretariat Gender Action Plan

Closing the gap:

Targets and commitments to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women staff in the UNAIDS Secretariat

2013-2018



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*[The UNAIDS Secretariat]
“continues to be a leader
in a variety of specific
areas related to gender
equality and women’s
empowerment, particularly:
gender architecture and
parity, organizational culture,
coherence, resource tracking,
monitoring and reporting,
strategic planning, and
knowledge generation and
communication.”*

UN-SWAP report 2014

I. Introduction

In 2013, the UNAIDS Secretariat launched its first Secretariat Gender Action Plan –a comprehensive framework to advance gender equality and empowerment of women within the organization.

The rationale for achieving this objective is clear: the connection between gender parity and organizational performance has been well documented. Organizations with a more equal representation of women at the senior management level considerably outperform their counterparts with a lower representation of women in senior positions. Research has also shown that gender-balanced teams have greater potential for creativity and innovation, and contribute to better decision outcomes. For UNAIDS, 'leading by example' is critical—an organization that calls for the elimination of gender inequality at the global level must also ensure its own internal policies and guidance follow suit.

The UNAIDS Secretariat Gender Action Plan –developed through a consultative, interactive process involving staff across the Secretariat– comprises measures to be taken in seven strategic focus areas, as well as six numeric targets for monitoring progress towards achieving gender equality in the Secretariat across all levels, with particular attention to senior positions. A central aim of the Secretariat Gender Action Plan is to reach 50/50 gender parity at all levels, but the plan goes beyond numerical targets, and is designed to nurture a supportive organizational culture for all staff.

Following consultation and review in 2015, the Action Plan was updated and extended to March 2018, giving the Plan an overall timeframe of five years: 2013 – 2018.

II. Guiding principles

- **Gender equality:** Gender equality will be embedded in UNAIDS' organizational culture and its human resources strategies, policies, guidelines, procedures and practices. The concept of gender equality has long been established among the core guiding principles of the UN system. The Charter of the United Nations—in Articles 8 and 101—stipulates that there shall be no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in every capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that there can be no distinction or discrimination on the basis of gender (Articles 2 and 23). The concept of equal rights is also embedded in the WHO Staff Regulations and Rules (adjusted, as necessary, to take into account special needs of UNAIDS): Staff Regulation 4.3 - "Selection of staff members shall be made without regard to race, creed or sex," and Regulation 4.2 - "The paramount consideration in the appointment, transfer, reassignment or promotion of the staff shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity".
- **Organizational excellence:** UNAIDS is committed to removing systemic barriers that perpetuate gender inequality in all its forms, including within its own staffing structures. Eliminating gender inequalities and empowering women have been at the centre of UNAIDS' programme, advocacy and policy work for many years. Achieving gender parity within the Secretariat enhances organizational effectiveness and efforts to support the achievement of the targets of the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS and the goal to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.
- **Staff as our strongest asset:** UNAIDS recognizes the value of staff as our strongest asset. Their full and active contribution is vital to the achievement of UNAIDS' vision. An organizational culture, in which gender parity and the empowerment of women is understood to be at the core of collective values and principles for a positive working environment, needs to be created. This environment should be sensitive to the needs and concerns of all staff and strive to address them, including the specific concerns and needs of female staff.

III. Objectives

The objectives of the Secretariat Gender Action Plan are to create the conditions for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women in the Secretariat, increasing women's opportunities and capacity to assume leadership positions. These objectives will build on:

- Sustained commitment and support by senior management;
- The talent and potential of staff at all levels; and
- The existing human resources strategy and related policies and their full implementation.

IV. Strategic focus areas

All staff need to assume personal responsibility for advancing the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women. This will ensure that UNAIDS is even more productive, inclusive, effective and credible.

The seven strategic focus areas that comprise this Plan were developed based on an all staff survey carried out in 2012, to assess the UNAIDS Secretariat's strengths, opportunities and challenges in achieving gender equality. The Survey was complemented through interviews and focus groups in the field and at Headquarters. A follow up survey in 2015 confirmed all areas as critical for ongoing development of the framework - which was then extended to March 2018. Since the launch of the Plan in 2013, progress can be seen across all areas.

The following measures are intended to guide us towards action.

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- ### Strategic focus areas
1. Leadership & accountability
 2. Organizational culture
 3. Recruitment & selection
 4. Staff development
 5. Work-life balance initiatives
 6. Communication & advocacy
 7. Monitoring & reporting

1. Leadership and accountability

“UNAIDS ranks among the strongest performing entities within the UN System.”

UN Women, 2016, on the UN-SWAP

Senior managers and line supervisors must demonstrate leadership and champion gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment. It is only through strong leadership and a system of accountability that there will be a foundation upon which gender balance and empowerment of women can be built.

UNAIDS submits annual reports against the 15 Performance Indicators of the UN System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women – or UN-SWAP – which was launched in 2012 and is coordinated through UN Women. Additionally, UNAIDS contributes to the UN Secretary General’s report to the General Assembly on improvement in the status of women. Through both these processes, the Secretariat is commended for providing leadership on gender equality in the workplace in the UN System. The UN-SWAP report for 2015 commended UNAIDS as a leader on gender in the workplace in the UN System, and it highlighted that UNAIDS performed significantly better than the UN System as a whole, with UNAIDS meeting or exceeding requirements in 87% of the performance indicator ratings - increasing by 7% our ratings from the previous year. In contrast, the other organizations of the UN met or exceeded 68% of all performance indicators and the UN System overall met or exceeded 57% of all performance indicators.

Since the launch of the Plan, the Executive Director and the Deputy Executive Directors have reaffirmed their commitment to the Gender Action Plan as a Secretariat-wide priority, including at internal and external meetings. UNAIDS has showcased the Secretariat’s experience with the Gender Action Plan during interagency discussions on UN reform and on enabling the UN system to be “fit for purpose” for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, and through the International Gender Champions initiative.

Linked to the above, concrete measures being taken in regards to leadership and accountability include:

- Approve clearly defined and measurable gender targets for vacant positions.
- Develop an accountability and management structure with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- Develop gender equality competency within the existing competency framework.
- Review the performance evaluation system and streamline gender into existing accountability and management structures.

2. Organizational culture: creating an enabling working environment

“We acknowledge with sincere gratitude UNAIDS’ ongoing commitment to being a leader and a strong ally in the area of gender equality.”

UN Women, 2016

UNAIDS’ organizational culture needs to be transformed so that it will fully support the goals of gender equality and the empowerment of women staff. The Secretariat needs to ensure that a gender-sensitive work environment supports the needs of all staff.

Gains towards achieving the targets of the Plan and progress in its seven strategic focus areas are highlighted in regular progress updates as well as through financial and staffing updates provided to managers, and through management updates shared with all staff.

An informal women’s network, initiated at Headquarters, continues to provide a platform for women in the Secretariat to exchange views and ideas, as well as contribute inputs to initiatives related to the objectives of the Plan. The network also draws on the opportunities provided by the Leadership Programme for Women and the webinars for the alumnae.

Linked to the above, concrete measures being taken in regards to organizational culture include:

- Develop a gender sensitization programme/support system and guidelines to empower managers, especially regional directors and UCCs, to promote gender sensitivity and staff development.
- Develop a plan of activities to champion women as leaders.
- Review and mainstream gender sensitivity into UNAIDS’ key management activities, e.g. management meetings, country assessments and reviews, annual management plans and reports, and projects such as UN Cares.
- Reinforce UNAIDS’ policy on zero tolerance for harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority with a periodic refresher training.
- Launch of an informal women’s network to provide a supportive forum for women and to facilitate the sharing of knowledge, advice, contacts and experience.

3. Recruitment and selection

“We applaud UNAIDS on its dedication to achieve the equal representation of women and men among its staff, and we acknowledge the impressive results obtained in the past years to increase the representation of women in the Professional and higher categories.”

UN Women, 2016

Recruitment and selection are the critical stages that determine the quality and composition of the Secretariat’s workforce, including the aspect of gender parity. Ensuring that a gender lens is factored into all recruitments and selections will foster an environment where qualified female candidates receive full consideration. In addition, increasing the number of women in management positions will positively influence gender parity within selection panels and other advisory or decision-making bodies, including the Mobility and Reassignment Committee (MRC).

UNAIDS mobility exercise is supported by a global and regional gender analysis and remains a critical tool to reach the targets related to gender parity among Country Directors, and at P4/P5 and above levels. Since the launch of the Plan in 2013, the number of women UCDs increased from 15 (27%) in February 2013 to 22 (40%) in February 2017. Overall, the Secretariat is just 2% away from reaching gender parity at the P4 and above levels.

The Secretariat’s new recruitment policy was issued in May 2015, with specific provisions related to gender equality and the empowerment of women, including that selection panels should include at least one woman, and qualified female candidates should be included in shortlists for vacancies. For vacancies at the P5 level and above, particular attention shall be paid to qualified female candidates.

Linked to the above, concrete measures being taken in regards to recruitment and selection include:

- Establish recruitment targets in support of gender parity, with a particular focus on increasing the numbers of women UCDs and in posts at the P-5 level and above, including the following:
 - At least half of short-listed candidates are women;
 - At least one third of all vacant positions to be filled by qualified female candidates; and
 - At least half of all vacant UCD positions to be filled by qualified female candidates.
- Encourage applications from both men and women with a view to improving gender parity in positions that are typically female or male dominated.
- Aim for all selection panels to have gender parity if that is not feasible, ensure at the minimum that one panel member is female.
- Target external recruitment, as required, when internal talent is not available. Institute internal talent searches for positions at the P-5 level and above, establish a pool of qualified female candidates, and provide career counseling and advice related to applications for vacant posts and opportunities for promotion.
- Identify qualified women staff for advancement to the international professional category, including national officers and senior-level general service staff who are interested in international posts, with emphasis on increasing the number of women in professional positions.
- Use the mobility exercise as a way to promote the advancement of women in regions where they are currently under-represented, and to increase the number of women UCDs and at the P-5 level and above.

4. Staff development

"We commend the continued monitoring and strengthening of UNAIDS unique mentoring and leadership programmes for female staff, as well as the 'Spotlight on UNAIDS Women' initiative."

UN Women, 2016

The Secretariat has a considerable wealth of internal talent across all three categories of staff. The national officer and general service categories represent a substantial pool in which talent should be identified, developed and deployed for higher-level posts. Learning and training initiatives which focus on the identification and capacity-building of internal staff are key activities.

The innovative UNAIDS Mentoring Programme for Women was launched in April 2014 and has so far supported 64 mentoring pairs through distance training and guidance during their year-long mentoring relationship. The programme aims to increase job satisfaction and contribute to professional growth and development for mentees from all categories of staff (GS, NO, P and D). The UNAIDS Mentoring Programme for Women has been presented at common system meetings as an example of best practice for growing internal talent and has inspired a number of UN entities to pursue similar programmes in support of women's empowerment.

A Leadership Programme for Women was developed and launched in partnership with the UN System Staff College to contribute to the further development and strengthening of leadership skills and capacities of female staff. During the three cohorts implemented to date, 91 women leaders in UNAIDS participated in a five-day workshop held in Turin, Italy. Guided by senior leaders from academia and the UN system, participants explore strategies to tackle common challenges for women in leadership positions and reflect on how to leverage their individual strengths. Each participant develops an action-plan to help guide their future priorities and growth. The Staff College has underlined that the UNAIDS programme inspired the College's system-wide leadership course for women. The 2015 report of the Secretary-General to ECOSOC on the United Nations System Staff College makes reference to the success of the tailor-made UNAIDS Leadership Programme for Women and the UNAIDS Gender Action Plan and that this has provided foundation

and inspiration for the development of the UNSCC system-wide Programme for Women Leaders.

Overall, one in three women at the UNAIDS Secretariat has participated in a development initiative under the Gender Action Plan.

Beyond those initiatives, UNAIDS ensures that 50% of staff attending the UNSSC UN Leaders Programme and UNCT Leadership Workshop – both aimed at nurturing a new generation of leaders in the UN – are women.

Linked to the above, concrete measures being taken in regards to staff development include:

Measures:

- Provide specialized career development, coaching and support for women staff.
- Support learning of new skills and competencies through short-term assignments and special projects.
- Develop leadership programmes for mid-level staff, with particular emphasis on women staff.
- Develop a senior-level leadership programme for women.
- Review and dissemination of existing gender e-learning materials available in the UN system.
- Develop gender-sensitivity training for all staff.
- Establish a mentoring programme.

5. Work-life balance

Managers throughout the Secretariat must be seen as supportive of flexible working arrangements. Work-life balance initiatives are a critical means to both enhance productivity and ensure a healthy environment for all staff to sustain their professional and personal goals.

The UNAIDS Flexible Working Arrangements Policy, issued in November 2013, contributes to the goals of the Plan. The Flexible Working Arrangements policy supports all staff and supervisors in optimizing productivity while enabling staff to successfully balance professional and private commitments. The Policy provides support to both women and men in balancing work and personal commitments, including provisions on maternity and paternity leave, flexible working arrangements and part-time working.

Linked to the above, concrete measures being taken in regards to work-life balance include:

- Put in place mechanisms to optimize the use of work-life balance policies by all staff, both women and men, and general service and professional, including demonstrated support by managers.
- Facilitate, through active involvement at the inter-agency level, spouse/partner employment for staff on mobility.
- Strengthen measures to support flexibility in leave without pay following parental leave.

6. Communication and advocacy

A communication plan linked to this Gender Action Plan ensures the dissemination of information on progress towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women, including mechanisms for sharing positive experiences among staff, as well as on the policies and measures taken in support of these goals.

Six editions of the 'Spotlight on UNAIDS Women' have featured 72 colleagues across the Secretariat, highlighting their role and contributions to the AIDS response. This initiative is welcomed throughout the Secretariat and has contributed to fostering a more inclusive organizational culture for all staff.

Regular updates on progress towards achieving the six targets and in the seven strategic focus areas are shared with all staff. An intranet page serves as one-stop location for information and materials related to the Gender Action Plan. <https://sites.google.com/a/unaids.org/unaids-intranet/services-for-staff/human-resources/secretariat-gender-action-plan>.

March 8 – International Women's Day – marks the date for annual Gender Action Plan progress updates, as well as a wider information campaign to help sensitize UNAIDS staff on progress and remaining challenges in reaching gender parity.

Linked to the above, concrete measures being taken in regards to communication and advocacy include:

- Develop and implement a communication plan for senior managers.
- Develop and implement a plan to disseminate information on policies and tools to all staff.
- Develop communications products to profile women leaders within the organization.

7. Monitoring and reporting

“Thanks to the continuous commitment to making gender equality a priority, we are confident that UNAIDS will be among the first specialized agencies to meet the requirements for all UN-SWAP indicators by the CEB deadline of 2017.”

UN Women, 2016

The seven strategic areas of focus and the six targets of the Plan are monitored on a systematic basis and progress reported at senior management meetings. Information on the Gender Action Plan is included in the annual strategic human resources update provided to the PCB. Since the time of its launch, several PCB delegations have noted the progress made in implementing the Plan and its focus on empowering women staff at the UNAIDS Secretariat.

Linked to the above, concrete measures being taken in regards to monitoring and reporting include:

- Develop a statistical baseline on gender parity.
- Regularly update gender workplace statistics and communicate findings to staff and senior managers for workforce planning.
- Summarize available data and feedback on the promotion of gender as a key competency (as part of the PER system) to evaluate achievement towards gender parity goals.
- Mainstream monitoring of progress against the Gender Action Plan into existing systems to gauge staff opinions and perceptions.
- Monitor the implementation of the gender parity policy.

V. Numerical targets

Six numeric targets provide monitoring of progress across the seven strategic areas, towards achieving gender equality in the Secretariat. Annual assessment of the targets shows significant progress in most target areas, particularly with regards to staff in senior positions.

UNAIDS Secretariat Gender Action Plan numerical targets and progress measured in February 2017:

TARGET 1

50/50

gender balance in the Secretariat



TARGET 2

50%

of UCDs are women



TARGET 3

50%

Of P5-level positions and above are held by women



TARGET 4

50%

Of P4-level positions and above are held by women



TARGET 5

50%

Of NOC/NOD positions are held by women



TARGET 6

50%

Of General Service (GS) positions are held by women



VI. Looking ahead

The significant progress made since the launch of the Gender Action Plan in 2013 emphasises the potential and commitment for continued action towards achieving gender equality and empowerment of women staff in the Secretariat.

Coupled with this progress, in 2015 a follow-up all staff survey to collect views on progress made in the seven strategic focus areas and the targets of the Plan confirmed their continued relevance for UNAIDS staff. Leadership and Accountability, Organizational Culture and Work-Life Balance emerged as the areas that staff felt were those of most importance, and overall, all seven areas received high approval ratings by staff – underscoring the need for sustained efforts across all areas and targets in the next phase of the implementation of the Plan, to ensure that gender equality becomes truly integral to the Secretariat’s culture.

RATING OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE KEY AREAS TO ADVANCE GENDER BALANCE



This progress is being recognised across the UN system, as demonstrated by the 2016 UN Women report on the Status of Women in the UN system, which ranks UNAIDS third in the entire system on gender parity among staff, while also noting UNAIDS Leadership Programme for Women and UNAIDS Mentoring Programme for Women as best practices. The report also highlights the UNAIDS Spotlight for Women, as an example of targeted outreach to women.

UNAIDS Secretariat continues to report yearly on the UN System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP), as mandated by the UN Chief Executives Board (CEB). UNAIDS Secretariat has submitted its UN-SWAP 2016 reporting and is well positioned to demonstrate 100% compliance, hence achieving the UN-SWAP targets one year before the CEB deadline.

As the Secretariat continues implementation of the targets and the strategic areas of focus through March 2018, efforts will be undertaken to review the progress of the framework, with a view to the development of the next Action Plan. In moving forward, UNAIDS will continue to champion gender equality and women's empowerment as a priority across all of its work.



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