



Baseline Assessment of UNICEF Human Resources Safeguarding Practices

Safeguarding is fundamental to protecting the rights, dignity, and well-being of all individuals, especially the most vulnerable. Guided by the principles of Convention on the Rights of Child, UNICEF has upheld its commitment to safeguarding everyone who interacts with its work from harm. This commitment was reinforced in March 2024 when UNICEF introduced a **new Policy on Safeguarding**. The Policy sets out safeguarding principles and standards, prohibited actions and expected practices.

To support the effective roll out of the new Policy, the UNICEF Evaluation Office commissioned a baseline assessment in close collaboration with the Division of Analytics, Planning and Monitoring and the Division of People and Culture. The assessment focused on current safeguarding practices in Human Resources (HR) and aimed to establish a baseline against which implementation will be measured in the future.

The **key objectives** of this baseline assessment were to:





Assess the implementation of safeguarding in the management of HR

Identify barriers and enablers to embedding safeguarding practices

Assess organizational readiness and provide recommendations for implementing the new Policy on Safeguarding

Data collection methods and analysis

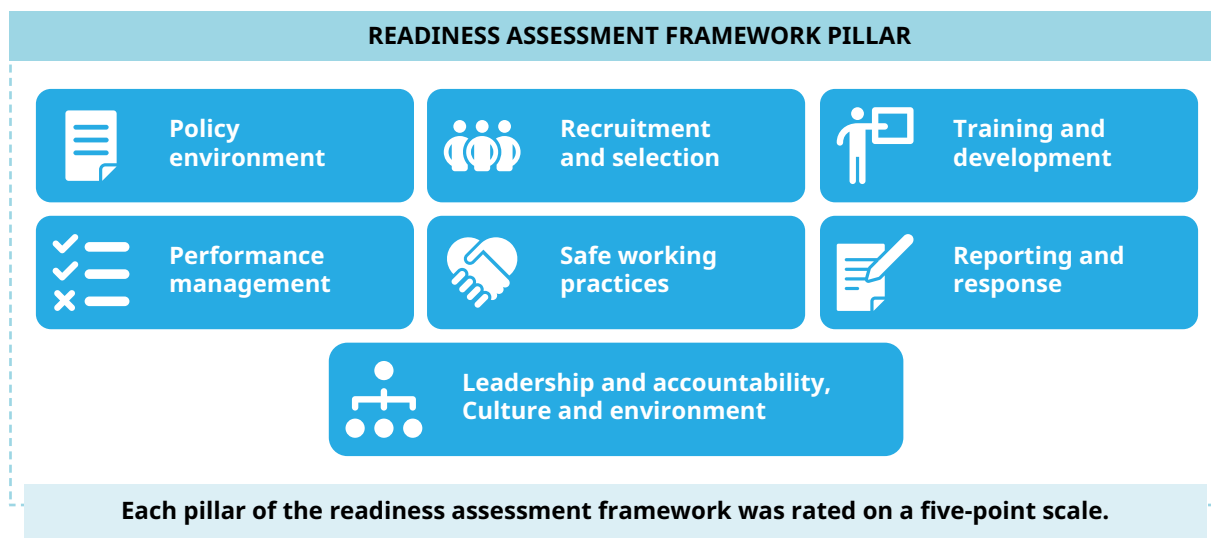
Figure 1. Data collection methods used in baseline assessment

Desk review 	Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) 	Self-assessment survey 	Benchmarking 
In-depth review of 13 policy documents	14 KIIs and three FDGs conducted with 26 UNICEF staff	Completed by the HR teams in 107 country offices	Benchmarking interviews with seven respondents from UN agencies and donor organization

The assessment used a mixed-method approach and included: desk review of 13 policy documents; interviews and group discussions with 26 key stakeholders in UNICEF in HQ, regional offices and country offices; and interviews with seven individuals from three UN agencies and one donor organization. An online survey was also administered to HR teams in all country offices (84% response rate, 107 out of 128 country offices).

The assessment was guided by a safeguarding readiness assessment which includes key pillars of HR functions and the existing safeguarding policy environment in UNICEF.

Figure 2. Readiness assessment framework pillars and scoring system







Possible scores ranged from red on the one end of the spectrum to dark green on the other end.

Red	Not currently in place
Amber	Some discussions and intention, but no evidence that it is in place
Yellow	Early stage/partially in place
Light Green	Nearly fully in place
Dark Green	Fully in place

Conclusions

The assessment rated most pillars either **Amber** or **Yellow**, indicating early or partial implementation. A summary of the main findings is provided in the table below.

Figure 3. Finding on the status and score against each of the readiness assessment framework pillar

 Policy environment	Policy on safeguarding exists however existing procedures on Human Resources are not aligned to the new Policy.	Yellow
 Recruitment and selection	Recruitment policies and procedures exist with elements of safeguarding, but are inconsistently applied.	Amber
 Training and development	Mandatory online induction training on PSEA is available but broader safeguarding training in-person and regular refresher courses to all personnel are needed.	Amber
 Performance management	Safeguarding is part of competency framework for managers, but since it is not required to be discussed during performance reviews, issues are less likely to be identified and addressed early.	Amber
 Safe working practices	Knowledge and practice on safeguarding vary at different organizational levels and contexts.	Yellow
 Reporting and response	Reporting and response mechanisms are generally well known, however personnel have limited knowledge about reporting the issues that are not categorized as prohibited actions.	Yellow
 Leadership, Accountability, Culture and Environment	Senior leadership commits to safeguarding, however, staff confidence in organisational response is low.	Amber

The assessment revealed that UNICEF has developed a Policy on Safeguarding that extends beyond child safeguarding and aims to reduce the risk of harm to all individuals who come into contact with the organization. However, existing HR procedures are not aligned with the new Policy, and the connection to relevant guidance on safeguarding across the HR cycle is limited.

There was consensus across UNICEF staff at headquarters (HQ), regional offices (ROs), and country offices (COs) consulted during the assessment that broadening the Policy was necessary. Nevertheless, awareness of safeguarding varied, and personnel had limited knowledge about how to implement the Policy, which poses a significant challenge to its rollout.

The assessment found that UNICEF has some foundational elements in place to support the rollout of the Policy on Safeguarding. Limited aspects of the Policy are already integrated into HR processes and

procedures, such as safe recruitment and performance management. But issues with resourcing, consistency, and the scope of the implementation across HQ, ROs, and COs require further attention.

The assessment identified emerging good practices on safeguarding across key HR functions. For example, efforts had been made to integrate safeguarding in staff recruitment processes in non-emergency settings. However, UNICEF now should ensure consistency in how the recruitment processes and performance management are applied across all roles, levels and operational contexts.

UNICEF is committed to implementing its Policy on Safeguarding in all contexts, including emergencies, where safeguarding risks are heightened. Application of this commitment requires significant additional effort. Particularly in emergency contexts, it is essential to balance the need for urgent life-saving actions while maintaining strong safeguarding procedures.

Recommendations

UNICEF's new Policy on Safeguarding marks a significant step forward to protecting the rights, dignity, and well-being of all individuals in everything UNICEF does. While foundational elements are in place, the assessment highlighted that UNICEF should consider these five recommendations in moving forward with implementation of the new Policy on Safeguarding.



RECOMMENDATION 1

Strengthening policy environment and implementation

UNICEF should strengthen its policy environment through procedures that support the operationalization of the Policy on Safeguarding and systematically streamline safeguarding in HR procedures and guidance.



RECOMMENDATION 2

Prioritization and communication of safeguarding

UNICEF leadership should make safeguarding an organizational priority and ensure regular, transparent communication with all personnel to promote safeguarding practices and build trust in the system.



RECOMMENDATION 3

Capacity building for all personnel

UNICEF should invest in dedicated safeguarding focal points, develop their capacities, and train all personnel. These efforts should align with existing structures and processes developed through child safeguarding, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), and the Ethics Office.



RECOMMENDATION 4

Institutionalizing consistent safeguarding practices

UNICEF should institutionalize the emerging good practices already being implemented in HR such as in recruitment and performance management and ensure these are being applied consistently across headquarters, regional and country offices and across different positions and levels.



RECOMMENDATION 5

Assessing and strengthening safeguarding in emergency contexts

UNICEF should enhance safeguarding procedures in emergency contexts by conducting rapid assessments to ensure recruitment processes that include safeguarding measures are consistently applied, even during urgent humanitarian responses. It is essential to review emergency recruitment protocols and be proactive in integrating safeguarding processes in anticipatory action.

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Children's Fund (UNICEF)
April 2025