Policy Title	Policy and Procedures for Implementation of UNFPA Social and Environmental Standards in Programming
Previous title (if any)	N/A
Policy objective	The purpose of this document is to set out UNFPA's policy and procedures for implementing the Social and Environmental Standards in Programming which is intended to ensure that there is no inadvertent harm on people and the environment caused by its programming, and to strengthen and mainstream sustainability and accountability in UNFPA programming in a systematic and comprehensive manner, going beyond a 'do no harm' approach.
Target audience	The policy applies to all UNFPA business units involved in programming.
Risk control matrix	Control activities that are part of the process are detailed in the Risk Control Matrix
Checklist	SES Checklist
Effective date	02 June 2022
Revision History	Issued: 02 June 2022
Mandatory review date	02 June 2025
Policy owner unit	Policy and Strategy Division
Approval	Link to approval template

**Policy and Procedures for Implementation of
UNFPA Social and Environmental Standards in Programming**

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I. Purpose

1. The purpose of this document is to set out UNFPA's policy and procedures for implementing the [Social and Environmental Standards (SES)](#) in programming. UNFPA's SES are an important building block to achieve sustainable development and provide guidance to UNFPA for the management of social and environmental risks and impacts in its strategies, policies, programmes and work plans[1]. The SES are intended to ensure there is no inadvertent harm on people and the environment caused by its programming, and to strengthen and mainstream social and environmental sustainability and accountability in UNFPA programming, going beyond a 'do no harm' approach.

2. The policy enables UNFPA to strengthen the quality of interventions and promote efficient programming by ensuring a principled approach in a systematic and comprehensive manner, and to maximize benefits to stakeholders involved. It establishes principles and procedures for implementing the SES in UNFPA programming, including the roles and responsibilities of relevant UNFPA business units. The policy applies to all UNFPA business units involved in programming at country, regional and global levels[2], in line with the [Policies and Procedures Manual on the Enterprise Risk Management (ERM)](#)[3] as an umbrella framework for risk management, with a few exceptional cases[4].

3. The policy responds to the UNFPA's commitment to social and environmental sustainability as reflected in the [UNFPA's Strategic Plan (2022-2025)](#)[5] and is aligned with the United Nations Strategy for sustainability management in the United Nations System, 2020-2030 [Phase I: Environmental sustainability in the area of management](#)' and [Phase II: Towards leadership in environmental and social sustainability](#), endorsed

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[1] According to the [UNFPA Financial Regulations and Rules](#), "programme" is defined as a plan for effectively delivering development results in line with the UNFPA's mandate through a set of subordinate workplans.

[2] For business units that are engaged in upstream work, the SES guiding principle-level standards can be considered, as relevant and applicable. There may be more to report at the country level where physical interventions are implemented using different modes of engagements such as downstream activities (e.g. service delivery) and with direct participation of stakeholders and beneficiaries. Depending on the relevance of the programme to each thematic area, business units have the flexibility to choose "not relevant" in the SES checklist and for those thematic areas marked as not relevant, no further action is required.

[3] SES are embedded in the Integrated Risk Framework of the ERM system as a programme risk component and under the safeguarding category (Reference: ERM policy pages 30-32).

[4] For business units that are engaged solely in the following functions or activities are exempt from SES risk screening and assessment as they are considered low risk: (a) preparation and dissemination of reports, documents and communication materials; (b) organization of an event, workshop, training; (c) strengthening capacities of partners to participate in international negotiations and conferences; (d) partnership coordination (including UN coordination) and management of networks; (e) global/regional programmes or interventions with no country level activities (e.g. knowledge management, inter-governmental processes); (f) development effectiveness programmes or interventions and institutional effectiveness programmes.

[5] Please refer to the [UNFPA Strategic Plan (2022-2025)](#) paras 93 and 107, and its [integrated results and resources framework](#) indicator OE1.24.

by the Chief Executives Board (CEB) in May 2019 and November 2021 respectively, and is complemented by the UNFPA Environmental Efficiency Strategy (2021-2025) and the UNFPA Climate Change Value Proposition as part of UNFPA's three-pronged approach to environment and climate.

II.   Policy

4. This policy outlines the principles and procedures for the implementation of the SES in programming including the roles and responsibilities of UNFPA business units, identifies control actions to mitigate potential risks related to the process, and establishes the` following:

4.1 Integration and mainstreaming of the SES

4.1.1 The head of unit[6] must ensure that adverse social and environmental risks and impacts are avoided, minimized and mitigated by systematically integrating and mainstreaming the SES in all UNFPA-funded programmes, including by undertaking social and environmental due diligence, risk management, mitigation, and redressal efforts.

4.1.2 The head of unit is responsible for ensuring overall compliance with the SES for programming in conjunction with the ERM policy and the UNFPA Environmental Efficiency Strategy (2021-2025) for office operations.

4.1.3 The head of unit must designate an SES focal point to manage social and environmental risks and impacts throughout the programme cycle. The head of unit must also ensure that the roles and responsibilities of relevant personnel are clearly included in their annual results plan.

4.1.4 The selected SES focal point must have a lead role in programme coordination, management, quality assurance and oversight. The SES focal point must take the e-learning course[7] to become familiar with the SES and its application to programming before taking on the responsibility.

4.2 Quality assurance and oversight

4.2.1 The head of unit is responsible for quality assurance of the implementation of the SES as part of their management responsibilities[8].

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[6] The head of unit refers to the representative, division director, regional or sub-regional director, country director, head of office or the Chief of Operations (or the delegated officer), as appropriate.

[7] The e-learning course on the UNFPA Social and Environmental Standards can be found in the UNFPA Taleo learning platform under the programme catalog.

[8] Please refer to the ERM process indicated in the ERM policy.

4.2.2 The SES focal point must ensure completion of the [SES checklist](#)[9] for screening and identifying social and environmental risks and impacts that may be caused by UNFPA programming, and developing, implementing, monitoring and reporting on the risk response action plan[10] as part of the ERM process.

4.2.3 Subsequently, the SES focal point shall continue to undertake quality assurance of SES integration during the implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting phases of its work plan activities through the existing reporting mechanisms.

4.2.4 Where it concerns joint programmes or other joint United Nations initiatives, UNFPA, in coordination with participating United Nations organizations, is responsible for ensuring compliance with the SES of UNFPA-funded activities within joint programmes or pooled Multi-Partner Trust Funds at country, regional, or global levels.

4.3 Implementing partners

4.3.1 According to the [Policy and Procedures for Selection, Registration and Assessment of Implementing Partners](#), where possible, priority should be given to partners who have socially and environmentally responsible policies in place.

4.3.2 UNFPA work plan managers shall support their implementing partners, as necessary, to promote integration of the social and environmental standards in their workplan design and implementation.

4.4 Stakeholder engagement and accountability[11]

4.4.1 The head of unit must ensure that UNFPA commitments to stakeholder engagement and accountability are understood and prioritized by all personnel and partners. In addition, the head of unit must engage with

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[9] The SES checklist serves as a screening tool to ensure that social and environmental sustainability issues are considered and integrated throughout the programming cycle and all available mitigation measures are applied in UNFPA programming.

[10] Country Offices can use the [Social and Environmental Action Plan Template](#) for developing appropriate risk response action plans specifically for social and environmental risks, which can later be integrated in the ERM system.

[11] While this policy is applicable to relevant business units across the organization, stakeholder engagement and accountability is mainly intended for country offices that implement programmes with stakeholders on the ground.

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stakeholders and key affected populations[12] throughout programming cycles, including during decision-making processes, and is responsible for obtaining and resolving grievances as a first line of defense. The head of unit must take the lead in facilitating the resolution of concerns regarding alleged or potential violations of UNFPA commitments to apply the SES.

4.4.2   In cases where grievances cannot be resolved at the country level, the head of unit shall escalate the matter to the respective regional office and/or headquarters to seek higher-level support for dispute resolution for social and environmental issues.

4.4.3   For joint programmes, the head of unit must leverage UNFPA's existing grievance mechanisms if available, or those of participating United Nations organizations, as appropriate, to access and resolve grievances that may have resulted from programme activities funded by UNFPA.

4.5 Support and guidance

4.5.1   The Policy and Strategy Division (PSD) is responsible for facilitating and providing support related to the SES implementation at the programme level, in consultation with the established Inter-Divisional Working Group on the SES or relevant business units, upon request.

4.5.2   PSD will support capacity strengthening including through provision of training materials and facilitating knowledge management by sharing best practices, lessons learned as well as examples of managing programmes with different levels of social and environmental risks and impacts.

4.6 Monitoring and Reporting

4.6.1   The head of unit must ensure that information on stakeholder grievances is collated and documented to ensure stakeholder accountability to key affected populations and for institutional redress and learning.[13]

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[12] Key affected populations include adolescents and young people, older persons, Afro-descendent and indigenous people, persons with disabilities, and migrants and refugees.
[13] While this policy is applicable to all relevant HQ, regional and country offices, data collection is mainly intended for country offices that implement programmes with stakeholders involved on the ground.

4.6.2 PSD must monitor and record the progress on SES implementation[14] in conjunction with the ERM process, and provide inputs to various UNFPA and UN system-wide reports.[15]

5. UNFPA business units involved in programming must apply the SES in conjunction with and complemented by other crosscutting UNFPA policies and procedures, management practices, and standard operating procedures, including those related to UNFPA's environmental management, procurement, implementing partners, and quality assurance.

III. Procedures

6. This section sets out procedures for systematically integrating and mainstreaming the SES into UNFPA's programming from the earliest stages of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to reporting, including through leveraging existing processes and mechanisms in line with the ERM.

7. Country offices, are expected to integrate the SES during the country programme design and development phase as part of the ERM-related activities - at least once in a given country programme development cycle.

8. The head of unit and SES focal points must refer to the procedures section on risk identification, assessment, risk response and escalation, risk validation and reporting in the latest ERM policy to ensure SES compliance in conjunction with the ERM system. The details of the required procedures for SES implementation are described below.

A. Risk screening, assessment and management[16]

Step 1: At the country level, an SES focal point[17] must complete the SES checklist during the design phase of the new country programme to a) screen and identify potential social and environmental risks and impacts against the standards, and b) categorize programme interventions according to the level of risks and impacts identified[18] and provide a

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[14] Monitoring and reporting could capture UNFPA's programming and operational targets, corresponding efforts and results associated with the SES implementation.

[15] The reports could include the Executive Director's annual report on the UNFPA Strategic Plan (2022-2025), the United Nations Strategy for Sustainability Management 2020-2030 - Phase II, and QCPR-related reports.

[16] In most cases, screening will be a desk-based exercise in which SES focal points draw on their experience and professional judgment based on evidence-based data, and where warranted, on technical expert advice.

[17] SES focal points are those who have a lead role in programme coordination, management, quality assurance and oversight.

[18] The details on the level of social and environmental risks and impacts can be found in the SES Checklist.

rationale for the categorization.[19] Early screening will help envisage how the SES may be best addressed in the programme design stage.

Step 2:   Upon completion of risk screening and risk-level classification, the SES focal point must ensure that a summary of the risk assessment is integrated into the ERM system.

Step 3-1: For programme interventions identified as medium to high risk, the SES focal point must develop a risk response action plan with appropriate mitigation measures to achieve compliance with the SES over a specific timeline, in line with the ERM process.[20] The SES focal point is encouraged to refer to the Model Approach Self-Assessment Tool[21] for developing relevant risk mitigation measures as it serves as a mitigation library and to use the Social and Environmental Action Plan Template for developing appropriate social and environmental action plans.

Step 3-2: For programme interventions identified as low risk, no specific action is required. However, the SES focal point is encouraged to develop and apply relevant mitigation measures throughout the programme cycle to ensure there is no inadvertent harm on people and the environment caused by its programming, and to strengthen and mainstream sustainability and accountability in UNFPA programming.

* In cases where it is not possible to find appropriate mitigation measures from the mitigation library, the country office should seek higher-level support from the respective regional office or headquarters as needed[22]. In addition, in cases where substantive revision is made after the initial screening and categorization, the head of unit must ensure the proposed programme interventions are re-screened and re-categorized.

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[19] Relevant business units, mainly country offices, are expected to undertake the ERM during the country programme design and development phases - prior to the approval of the country programme document by the UNFPA Executive Board.

[20] Please refer to the ERM guidance for detailed guidelines.

[21] The Model Approach self-assessment tool serves as a mitigation library that UNFPA offices can use as a reference.

[22] If necessary, additional assessment measures shall be integrated into the programme's design and implementation plans, and relevant assessment and management measures proportionate to the level of risks and impacts shall be developed and implemented, including application of a precautionary approach and adherence to the mitigation hierarchy. Social and environmental analysis may be required for moderate risk programmes and a full social and environmental impact assessment may be required for high-risk programmes.

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Step 4:   Subsequently, the SES focal point must integrate the risk response action plan in its annual results plan, and implement it accordingly throughout the programme cycle.

Step 5:   The head of unit must ensure the direct participation of affected stakeholders throughout the programming cycle including decision-making processes, and must take the lead in obtaining and resolving grievances.

Step 6:   The head of unit must ensure the SES are adhered to during the development and implementation phases of the country programme in conjunction with the ERM policy.

Note: During the acute phase of an emergency or humanitarian crises (whether during conflicts, disasters or public health emergencies), UNFPA programmes and activities may be adjusted as required to prioritize rapid response activities and the local contexts. In such cases, UNFPA, in coordination with the United Nations Country Team and/or Humanitarian Country Team, will identify the national and local social and environmental risks for humanitarian response activities. Further operational requirements can be addressed as activities transition to longer-term interventions in the context of systems strengthening, bearing in mind that the SES will be integrated into programming activities as situations transition from preparedness and emergency response to early recovery and development.[23]

B. Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

Step 7:   For programme interventions identified as medium-high risk, the SES focal point is required to monitor and report on the progress made on the risk response action plan and ensure relevant risk mitigation measures are implemented for complying with the SES.

Step 8:   The SES focal point must ensure the direct participation of affected stakeholders, where possible, and in particular, during the monitoring and evaluation phases of the intervention, to complement and verify monitoring and evaluation activities.

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[23] UNFPA aims to integrate the SES into its crisis response training, protocols and standard operating procedures, and to draw synergy with the Accountability for Affected Populations (AAP) and Inclusion Framework that is currently under development .

C. Stakeholder engagement and accountability

The following steps must be undertaken in parallel to the above-mentioned processes.

Step 9:   The head of unit must ensure that stakeholders and affected populations are engaged throughout the programming cycle and in the design, decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases, by taking into account UNFPA's Accountability to Affected Populations Framework and the Operational Guideline 2021 Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)[24].

The head of unit ensures that stakeholders and affected populations have access to accessible community feedback and complaints mechanisms and are fully aware of where and how to provide feedback or raise grievances resulting from UNFPA programme activities on the *ground*. The head of unit ensures that a specific consultation is organized should the need arise and maintains adequate documentation of evidence of stakeholder engagement.

Step 10:   The head of unit must work with affected parties to resolve complaints and undertake necessary actions towards ensuring that they have access to timely, transparent and relevant information and grievance redress, and maintain records of complaints and their outcomes.

Step 11:   The head of unit shall regularly communicate in languages, formats and media that are culturally appropriate and accessible, and provide updates to programme-affected communities on the implementation of the SES-related measures and on issues identified from the stakeholder consultation process or through grievance redress. The head of unit must ensure information is shared with confidentiality and that security considerations are always maintained.

Step 12:   In cases where grievances cannot be resolved at the country level, the head of unit shall escalate it to the respective regional office who is responsible for providing backstopping support, upon request, in responding to stakeholder grievances. In cases where dispute resolution

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[24] The 2021 Operational Guidance on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) provides operational guidance, easy-to-use checklists, and outlines key tools and resources for UNFPA staff to ensure that communities are meaningfully and continuously involved in decisions that directly affect their lives. This guidance can be applied not only for humanitarian settings but for development and other settings. Please also refer to the IASC guidance note on AAP and other related IASC guidance.

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is not possible at the country or regional levels, an organization-wide compliance review and independent investigation may be required to identify corrective measures and provide recommendations.

IV.   Other - Definitions

- Accountability for Affected Population (AAP) refers to the "Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)'s definition of AAP as "an active commitment by humanitarian actors to use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by the people they seek to assist.[25]
- Business Unit: headquarters divisions, branches, and units; representation offices; regional and sub-regional offices and country offices through which UNFPA operates and implements its programmes.
- Compliance review is a process to respond to claims by stakeholders alleging that UNFPA activities implemented or executed as part of its programmes do not comply with the UNFPA's SES.
- Enterprise Risk Management: ERM is the organization-wide process of structured, integrated, and systematic identification, analysis, evaluation, treatment, and monitoring of risks towards the achievement of organizational objectives.
- Enterprise Risk Management Secretariat (ERMS): Under the overall leadership of the Chief Risk Officer and supervision of the ERM Coordinator, ERMS is responsible for designing, managing, and coordinating the risk management process and ensuring its effectiveness.
- Grievance redress is a process that provides people allegedly affected by UNFPA activities implemented as part of its programmes access to appropriate dispute resolution mechanisms for hearing and addressing programme-related disputes.
- Head of unit refers to the representative, division director, regional or sub-regional director, head of office, country director or the Chief of Operations (or the delegated officer), as appropriate.
- Implementing partner is defined as "the entity to which the Executive Director has entrusted the implementation of UNFPA programme activities specified in a signed document, along with the assumption of full responsibility and accountability for the effective use of UNFPA resources and the delivery of outputs as set forth in such programme documentation" according to the UNFPA Financial Regulations and Rules.
- Investigation means a fact-finding process, i.e., a process by which evidence is sought capable of ascertaining facts to permit a determination whether or not wrongdoing has occurred. Investigations may range from fraud and corruption, to workplace harassment, abuse of authority, retaliation against whistle-blowers, sexual exploitation and abuse, and other violations of applicable regulations, rules and administrative or policy issuances.

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[25] https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/aap_psea_2-pager.pdf
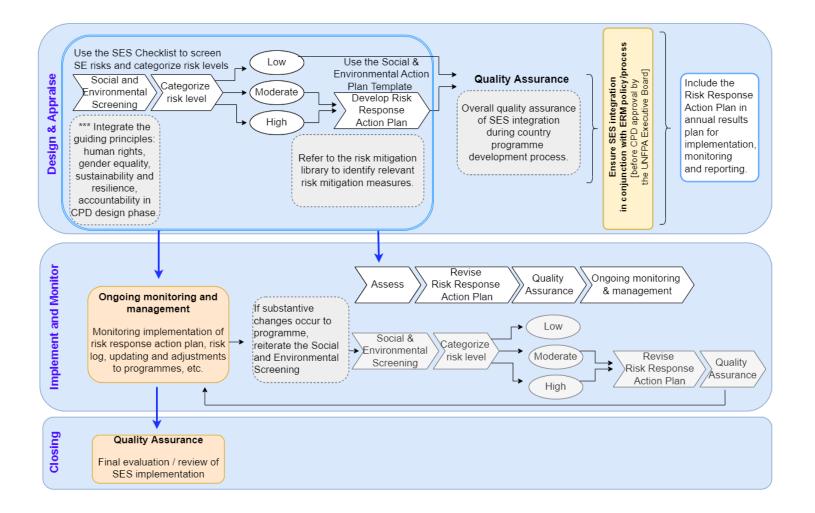
- Oversight means the processes by which to ensure organizational, programme, financial, operational and individual accountability, effectiveness of internal controls, including prevention and detection of fraud and malpractice.
- Risk management (also referred to as enterprise or entity risk management or ERM) is a process effected by the Executive Board, management and other personnel, applied in strategy setting and across UNFPA, designed to identify potential events that may affect UNFPA, and manage risk to remain within its risk appetite, to provide reasonable assurance regarding the achievement of UNFPA objectives.
- Social and Environmental Standards (SES) are a common benchmark framework that provides a set of actions and recommendations to avoid and prevent inadvertent harm to people and the environment that may occur as a result of UNFPA programming.

Accompanying Policies and Tools

Accompanying policies and tools for SES implementation can be found here.

V.   Process Overview Flowchart

Social and environmental risk management in the UNFPA programme cycle[26].

VI.   Risk Control Matrix

Risk control matrix may be found here.

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[26] The diagram shows a schematic outline of the full integration of the SES throughout UNFPA's programme cycle however, the contents may vary depending on the specific characteristics of each sector and associated risks.

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ANNEXES

Annex I.   **UNFPA Social and Environmental Standards (SES)**

The UNFPA Social and Environmental Standards (SES) are a set of standards in eight thematic areas - together with actions and recommendations - to prevent and mitigate inadvertent harm to people and the environment that could be caused by programming, and to mainstream sustainability and accountability in a systematic and comprehensive manner, beyond a 'do no harm' approach.

Annex II.   **Social and Environmental Standards Checklist**

The SES checklist is an operational screening tool to identify potential social and environmental risks and impacts that may be caused by UNFPA programming. This checklist complements the risk management checklist as part of the ERM system.

The checklist provides existing UNFPA and UN System-wide policies and guidelines related to sustainable management for programme implementers to refer to as they screen their programmes for compliance with the SES. It helps ensure that social and environmental sustainability issues are considered and integrated into a programme's design, and determine all available mitigation measures are applied in UNFPA programming, enhancing the quality of programmes.

All programmes must take into account the checklist prior to and during programme implementation, in order to determine whether all mitigation measures available within UNFPA have been applied to ensure potential harmful impacts on people and the environment are avoided, mitigated or minimized to the maximum extent possible.

While early screening will help envisage how the SES may be best addressed in the programme design stage as part of a planning process, implementation and monitoring of identified risks facilitate risk management and mitigation measures throughout the programme life cycle.

Annex III.   Social and Environmental Action Plan

As per the ERM process, business units are required to develop, implement, monitor and report on risk response action plans. To aid this process, the Social and Environmental Action Plan template can be used to develop a specific plan for avoiding, minimizing and mitigating social and environmental risks and impacts identified from the SES Checklist, with specific description of summary of risks, proposed mitigation measures, risk significance, responsible party/person, timeline and expected results. The Model Approach Self-Assessment Tool serves as a library of recommended mitigation measures that an SES focal point can reference.

Annex IV.   Strategy for sustainability management in the United Nations system, 2020-2030 Phase II: Towards leadership in environmental and social sustainability

The Sustainability Strategy II, endorsed by the Chief Executives Board (CEB) in November 2021, describes how environmental and social sustainability considerations can be mainstreamed in the United Nations system and UN entities, building on 30+ existing UN strategies and action plans that are in place already and aims at fostering greater coherence.

The Strategy calls for action for UN entities to mainstream all sustainability principles it promotes into its own internal functions across policies, programming and support functions, with an aim to become a leader in environmental and social sustainability management.

The Strategy includes (i) a comprehensive set of environmental and social sustainability principles (aligned with the 2030 Agenda and other UN frameworks) that need to be mainstreamed across all functions; (ii) a theory of change to mainstream the principles in different system-level and entity-level processes; and (iii) a draft scorecard to measure progress; the scorecard is in draft form and will be linked to existing reporting mechanisms on environmental/social sustainability.