

# UNICEF Competency Framework

→ Behaviours to guide  
the way we work



## OUR VALUES



## Foreword

As we work together to drive change for children and young people across the globe, we must hold ourselves, our colleagues and our organization to the highest standards.

UNICEF's Competency Framework establishes common standards of behaviour to guide the way we work and is based on our core values of Care, Respect, Integrity, Trust and Accountability.

Building from our previous competencies, this updated framework now consists of eight competencies and a set of behavioural indicators for each. All of our people will be assessed by the framework to varying degrees, depending on their job level. We will all be held accountable for our behaviours.

We aim to integrate the framework in everything we do, especially in how we attract, develop, assess, and retain our staff. This also includes recognizing and providing professional development opportunities for staff who embody our competencies and core values in their work.

I am excited to champion this framework and call on all UNICEF colleagues to do the same. Together, let us all demonstrate the highest standards of behaviour for the benefit of our workplace culture, our stakeholders and every child, everywhere.

**Henrietta H. Fore**  
*UNICEF Executive Director*

“ Our framework has  
behavioural indicators  
for every competency, which makes it  
much more real, tangible and  
a foundation for discussions.”

- Eva Mennel, *Director, Division of Human Resources*

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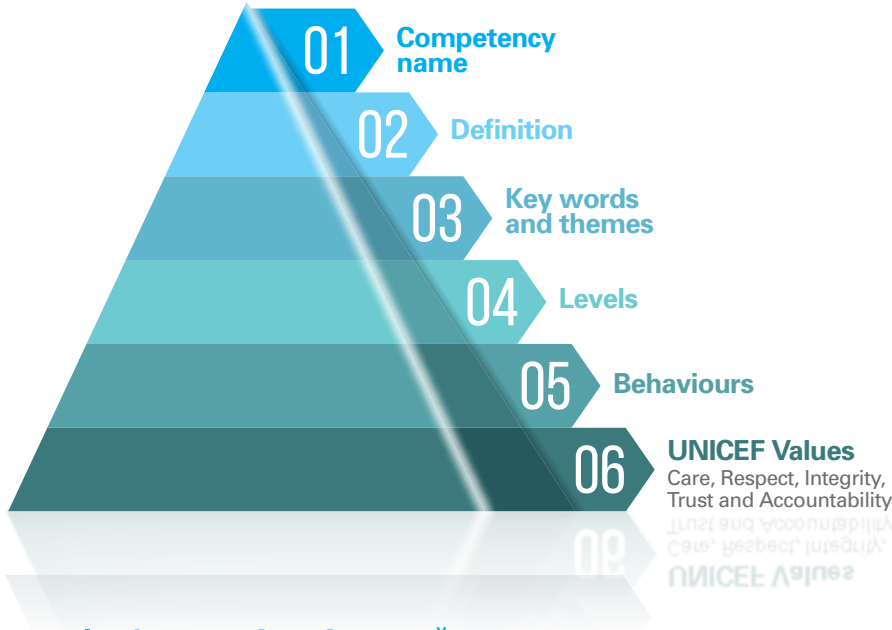
# Eight competency areas

Our framework is made up of 8 competency areas.  
1 to 7 are listed in alphabetical order and 8 is a dedicated people management competency specifically for managers and supervisors.



# Values

UNICEF’s new values statement is a critical foundation in guiding our decisions and actions. When developing the competency framework, it was essential that it addressed all five values. The alignment of the values with the overall framework, with the demonstration of specific behaviours is presented in the diagram below.



# Level descriptions\*

- Individual contributor:**  
Level 1: Colleagues without people management responsibility, who are accountable for their own individual performance and their contribution to the outputs of the team. Describes the core behaviours required of all colleagues across the organization, regardless of contract type, job role or grade level.
- Team manager:**  
Level 2: Applies to all colleagues who have operational and functional responsibility for a team. Manages individual and team performance.
- Manager of multiple teams:**  
Level 3: Applies to senior colleagues with responsibility and accountability for multiple teams.

The levels are cumulative and all colleagues, regardless of contract type, job role or grade level, are expected to demonstrate the core behaviours outlined in level 1. This means that:

- Team Managers at level 2 are expected to demonstrate the behaviours outlined in both levels 1 and 2 and
- Managers of Multiple Teams at level 3 are expected to demonstrate the behaviours outlined in all three levels.

\*The competency area, **Nurtures, Leads and Manages People**, is an additional competency for managers and leaders with people management responsibilities. The level descriptions are on page 12.





# Builds and maintains partnerships

**Definition:** Build a network of external stakeholders and alliances with government counterparts, civil society, the media and the private sector, in order to promote and advance the work of the organization.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Individual contributor	Team manager	Manager of multiple teams
<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop a network of formal and informal contacts through participation in professional networks or consultations with others.</li><li>• Adopt a consultative approach and solicit the support of key stakeholders at critical stages of one's work.</li><li>• Act as a role model for UNICEF, strengthening the reputation of the organization.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collaborate with other UN entities, public and private sector partners, sharing knowledge and contributing to best practice.</li><li>• Advocate, influence and negotiate reflecting the needs of children, women and young people in discussions with key decision makers.</li><li>• Promote and select partners who share UNICEF's values.</li><li>• Ensure that feedback from key stakeholders is incorporated into programme design, implementation and team learning.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Initiate new partnerships, including with the private sector and media.</li><li>• Anticipate changing priorities, working with partners to create long-term and sustainable opportunities.</li><li>• Act as a credible and convincing spokesperson and negotiator for UNICEF.</li></ul>

# Demonstrates self-awareness and ethical awareness

**Definition:** *Self-aware* of own strengths, limitations, working style and deeply held convictions and biases. Displays *ethical awareness* through behaviours that are consistent and compliant with the standards of conduct for international civil servants, UNICEF's values and relevant UNICEF policies and procedures.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Individual contributor	Team manager	Manager of multiple teams
<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <p><b>Self-awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Display sensitivity and adjust language and tone, ensuring it is not demeaning or aggressive.</li><li>• Recognize own strengths and limitations, learning from mistakes made.</li><li>• Seek feedback from multiple sources on own behaviours, including unconscious biases and potential blind spots. Act on the feedback received.</li><li>• Be transparent in admitting mistakes and take corrective action.</li><li>• Recognize personal stress and seek help to maintain personal well-being.</li></ul> <p><b>Ethical awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Display appropriate ethical behaviours, refraining from discriminatory* language and actions.</li><li>• Challenge unprofessional and unethical behaviours by standing up against actions that are not aligned with UNICEF's values.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <p><b>Self-awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be open and objective to feedback without being defensive or taking retaliatory actions.</li><li>• Communicate and reinforce behaviours within the team that are aligned to UNICEF's values.</li><li>• Be mindful of the authority and influence that comes with the role and prevent the abuse of authority.</li></ul> <p><b>Ethical awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrate impartial application of organizational policies, procedures and practices.</li><li>• Respond appropriately to ethical issues and complaints of abuse of authority, bullying or harassment.</li><li>• Provide a protective environment in which colleagues can speak up and act without fear.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <p><b>Self-awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promote the importance of demonstrating self-awareness in driving change to culture and preventing the abuse of authority.</li></ul> <p><b>Ethical awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Role model and lead by example in the demonstration of ethical behaviours.</li><li>• Create and promote a culture that establishes zero-tolerance for discriminatory* language and behaviours.</li><li>• Create and promote a culture that establishes procedures to address unethical behaviours.</li><li>• Take decisive action on ethical dilemmas.</li></ul> <p><i>continued on next page...</i></p>



\* Discriminatory refers to sexist, racist, xenophobic and homophobic, language and behaviours.



Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Individual contributor	Team manager	Manager of multiple teams
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Voice opinion in a truthful and respectful manner.</li><li>• Apply UNICEF's core values in personal and professional life, demonstrating consistency between words and actions.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Challenge difficult or controversial issues and demonstrate courage in alignment with UNICEF's values.</li></ul>	

# Drive to achieve results for impact

**Definition:** Commits to action and assumes responsibility and ownership for own performance and the associated outcomes.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Individual contributor	Team manager	Manager of multiple teams
<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan and take ownership for delivering tasks with minimal supervision.</li><li>• Pay attention to detail, producing work of a high standard.</li><li>• Monitor activities on a regular basis, reviewing work plan to ensure progress and delivery.</li><li>• Ensure the completion of tasks, while addressing obstacles and bottlenecks.</li><li>• Take responsibility for consequences of decisions and failures without passing blame to others.</li><li>• Involve key stakeholders in activities that impact them, keeping them informed of potential delays and problems.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inspire a sense of purpose, providing vision and direction to guide the team to achieve the desired impact.</li><li>• Ensure coherence in the activities of the team, communicating strategic priorities and setting clear deliverables.</li><li>• Undertake team progress reviews, discussing and taking corrective measures.</li><li>• Predict possible roadblocks in achieving results while providing guidance and support.</li><li>• Promote an environment where team members learn from individual and collective successes and mistakes.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Act as a role model, creating and promoting a performance culture where colleagues have a strong sense of accountability and fulfilment.</li><li>• Promote a culture of focus on the needs of key stakeholders in the delivery of results.</li><li>• Create an environment of performance measurement, seeking feedback from key stakeholders to assess effectiveness.</li><li>• Take full responsibility and accountability for the teams' shortcomings, providing support in areas requiring development.</li><li>• Promote the prioritization of project/programme deliverables with team managers to ensure clarity and focus.</li></ul>





# Innovates and embraces change

**Definition:** Is open to and proposes new approaches and ideas. Adapts and responds positively to change.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Individual contributor	Team manager	Manager of multiple teams
<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Review work practices, analysing evidence-based trends to apply new methods and techniques.</li><li>Respond flexibly to changing circumstances, priorities and deadlines.</li><li>Display creativity, experiment with new approaches and demonstrate openness to changing existing practices.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Encourage innovation and promote the importance of team members engaging in change initiatives.</li><li>Communicate and keep colleagues motivated during times of uncertainty and change.</li><li>Involve the team and a wide range of stakeholders in generating ideas, recommendations and solutions.</li><li>Recognize innovative thinking, creativity and calculated risk taking.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Lead and champion change initiatives, mobilizing teams to respond to changing priorities.</li><li>Promote an environment that drives creativity, innovation, flexibility and responsiveness.</li><li>Promote a culture supportive of challenges to the status quo, while maintaining rigor in the evaluation of new ideas.</li><li>Create and promote a culture encouraging the sharing of success and failure to promote individual and collective learning.</li></ul>



# Manages ambiguity and complexity

**Definition:** Demonstrate resilience and composure, get things done despite challenges and maintain performance levels in pressured, adverse and uncertain environments.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Individual contributor	Team manager	Manager of multiple teams
<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Maintain focus on priorities and deliverables, in the face of pressure, or when things do not go according to plan.</li><li>Demonstrate flexibility, developing alternate plans in rapidly changing situations, uncertainty and adversity.</li><li>Analyse and exercise judgment in challenging situations in the absence of specific guidance.</li><li>Manage personal frustrations to avoid potential conflict.</li><li>Identify key issues and priorities, maintaining personal effectiveness in complex situations.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Anticipate obstacles, adapt team priorities, develop alternative plans and solutions in consultation with the team.</li><li>Maintain team effectiveness and morale when dealing with changing priorities or ambiguous situations.</li><li>Manage the impact of complex and uncertain environments on programming activity and colleagues' well-being.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Promote and maintain a positive work atmosphere, supporting teams to remain productive and achieve results despite operating in a complex environment.</li><li>Provide stability in the face of conflicting external pressures, tensions and opposition from stakeholders.</li><li>Promote organizational resilience by communicating openly and honestly about challenges and the actions required to address them.</li></ul>





# Thinks and acts strategically

**Definition:** Understands the big picture and is able to identify potential opportunities for action and challenges that exist. Forms sound evidence-based judgements in the delivery of UNICEF's results.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Individual contributor	Team manager	Manager of multiple teams
<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understand the organization's objectives and align work plan activities.</li><li>• Analyse and evaluate data from a wide range of sources, assessing reliability and presenting conclusions to enable informed decision-making.</li><li>• Adapt workplans in response to emerging situations and new requirements.</li><li>• Consider the long-term impact and risks of decisions and actions.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clarify and shape the team's role and purpose in delivering UNICEF's priorities. Keep the team informed and provide guidance.</li><li>• Solicit the views and perspectives of team members when developing recommendations.</li><li>• Facilitate engagement with other teams and stakeholders in addressing priorities and strategies.</li><li>• Take responsibility for team decisions, providing the rationale as appropriate.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promote collaboration with key stakeholders, openly sharing knowledge, insights and effective practices.</li><li>• Encourage and create a culture of involving key stakeholders in making critical organization-wide recommendations and decisions.</li><li>• Create an environment of evidence-based analysis, risk management, prioritization and timely decision-making.</li><li>• Scan the external environment to explore new/emerging areas and identify opportunities and initiatives.</li></ul>

# Works collaboratively with others

**Definition:** Establish and maintain mutually supportive working relationships, demonstrating sensitivity to people of diverse backgrounds, respecting differences and ensuring that all can contribute and succeed.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Individual contributor	Team manager	Manager of multiple teams
<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Challenge colleagues respectfully when views and opinions differ.</li><li>• Encourage others to contribute ideas and listen without interruption.</li><li>• Support colleagues in achieving their goals.</li><li>• Earn the trust and confidence of colleagues through respectful, honest behaviours, displaying openness and tolerance.</li><li>• Seek the input of internal stakeholders, gaining buy-in and commitment while sharing relevant information.</li><li>• Address issues, conflicts and misunderstandings between self and others.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Seek the input of team members, ensuring the voices of diverse groups are heard, and involving them in decisions that affect them.</li><li>• Acknowledge conflict and disagreement in the team and work to facilitate resolution as appropriate.</li><li>• Encourage proactive collaboration with other teams, acknowledging contributions and ideas.</li><li>• Keep the team informed about decisions and, as appropriate, explain the rationale behind these.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Promote a culture that values diverse opinions, with input from all colleagues, regardless of hierarchy.</li><li>• Promote empowering working environments, ensuring dignity and respect for all colleagues, while holding team managers accountable.</li><li>• Promote a collaborative working culture based on participatory approaches to eliminate silos.</li><li>• Promote a culture where colleagues and teams have opportunities to learn from conflict and disagreement.</li></ul>







# Level descriptions

## Nurtures, leads and manages people

The competency area, **Nurtures, leads and manages people**, is an additional competency for managers and leaders with people management responsibilities.

**People manager:**

Level 1: Applies to all colleagues who have people management responsibility for 1 or 2 employees. Manages individual performance.

**Team manager:**

Level 2: Applies to all colleagues who have operational and functional responsibility for a team. Manages individual and team performance.

**Manager of multiple teams:**

Level 3: Applies to senior colleagues with responsibility and accountability for multiple teams.

The levels are cumulative and all colleagues, regardless of contract type, job role or grade level, are expected to demonstrate the core behaviours outlined in level 1. This means that:

- Team Managers at level 2 are expected to demonstrate the behaviours outlined in both levels 1 and 2 and
- Managers of Multiple Teams at level 3 are expected to demonstrate the behaviours outlined in all three levels.

# Nurtures, leads and manages people

**Definition:** Provide exemplary management and leadership, motivating and developing colleagues to perform at their best, while building diverse and inclusive teams.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
People manager	Team manager	Manager of multiple teams
<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Delegate responsibility and authority, while fairly allocating tasks, clarifying expectations and providing clear direction and guidance.</li><li>• Support colleagues in developing realistic work plans based on programmatic needs.</li><li>• Regularly discuss performance, giving timely, constructive feedback, providing support to address issues and taking action when necessary.</li><li>• Identify learning goals for colleagues, providing guidance on how to achieve them and ensure a supportive environment for professional and personal development.</li><li>• Support career development opportunities for colleagues, devoting time to coach, mentor and build confidence to achieve personal and career goals.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide team managers with the needed direction to achieve results and hold them accountable.</li><li>• Create inclusive teams, reflective of the diverse nature of the UNICEF workforce.</li><li>• Recognize individual contribution and acknowledge team success.</li><li>• Create opportunities for all colleagues to be heard and facilitate constructive discussions.</li><li>• Dedicate time and energy to the well-being of colleagues, monitoring emotional reactions and their ability to adjust to challenging circumstances.</li></ul>	<p><b>THE ABILITY TO:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create and promote an environment where colleagues can voice their concerns without fear.</li><li>• Role model effective people management behaviours, emphasising their importance to team managers and holding them accountable.</li><li>• Support direct reports to develop their leadership capabilities, providing honest feedback about their performance and ensuring relevant support.</li><li>• Create and promote a culture of fairness, transparency and inclusion where colleagues from all backgrounds and perspectives feel empowered and valued.</li><li>• Promote a culture of continuous learning and knowledge sharing within and amongst teams.</li><li>• Create an environment where team managers promote and role model employee well-being and self-care.</li></ul>





Care



Respect



Integrity



Trust



Accountability

unicef  | for every child