



# **INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION**

## **REPORT 2025/091**

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### **Audit of the management of the Department of Social and Economic Affairs subprogramme on population**

**While the Population Division generally delivered its mandated outputs, it needed to improve planning, risk management and monitoring mechanisms**

**29 December 2025**

**Assignment No. AN2025-540-02**

# **Audit of the management of the Department of Social and Economic Affairs subprogramme on population**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the management of the Department of Social and Economic Affairs (DESA) subprogramme on population. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of management of the subprogramme on population in delivering its mandated objectives. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2023 to 31 May 2025 and focused on: (a) work planning; (b) work plan implementation; (c) performance monitoring; and (d) resource management.

The Population Division continued to produce widely used demographic outputs and maintained generally sound controls over resource management. However, some gaps in work planning, risk management, quality assurance, knowledge management, and performance monitoring limited accountability and reduced the Division's ability to ensure timely and efficient delivery of its mandated activities.

OIOS made seven recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, DESA Population Division needed to:

- Strengthen its work planning process by establishing clear instructions, aligning division and sections' workplans, documenting shared responsibilities, and incorporating measurable indicators for effective monitoring and accountability.
- Incorporate risk management into divisional work processes and ensure continuous monitoring and management of risks at all levels within the Division.
- Establish and implement a standardized knowledge management framework across the Division to ensure systematic documentation, preservation, and accessibility to institutional knowledge.
- Implement a quality assurance and peer review framework to ensure analytical products are systematically reviewed, documented, and aligned with DESA and United Nations publication requirements.
- Establish a structured performance monitoring mechanism with standardized reporting and periodic progress reviews to ensure timely follow-up and corrective action on deliverables.
- Establish a structured mechanism to systematically integrate feedback into programme planning and implementation processes to enhance performance and accountability.
- Take additional measures to ensure staff compliance with mandatory training requirements.

DESA accepted all recommendations and has initiated action to implement them. Actions required to close the recommendations are indicated in Annex 1.

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# **Audit of the management of the Department of Social and Economic Affairs subprogramme on population**

## **I. BACKGROUND**

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the management of the Department of Social and Economic Affairs (DESA) subprogramme on population.
2. The subprogramme is managed by the Population Division of DESA to contribute to improving knowledge of global population trends, advancing an evidence-based understanding of the interactions between population change and sustainable development among policymakers and the public, strengthening the international community's capacity to effectively address current and emerging population issues, and integrating the population dimension into the international development agenda.
3. The Division, which was established in 1946 to serve as the secretariat of the Population Commission, has had a steady increase in mandates, which now include: (a) migration data leadership and capacity development; (b) follow-up and monitoring of progress on the Global Compact for Migration and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) population targets; (c) population-related policy support and discussions; and (d) inter-agency coordination and cooperation. Some of the demographic information produced by the Division, such as global estimates and projections of population sizes and migration data, constitute the only authoritative source of their kind and are widely used by governments, international organizations, researchers, and development partners across the globe.
4. The Division operates through two main branches and a front office with the following functions:
  - a. **Population Policies and Development Branch** – comprises two sections and analyses global trends and government policies related to fertility, ageing, migration, and urbanization; prepares analytical and intergovernmental documentation; and supports expert meetings and inter-agency coordination in these thematic areas.
  - b. **Population Trends and Analysis Branch** – comprises three sections and produces global demographic estimates and projections; develops and applies demographic methods for analyzing fertility, mortality, and migration; maintains key data systems; and supports inter-agency coordination, expert meetings, and intergovernmental processes.
  - c. **Front office** – comprises the office of the Director and three units and provides strategic leadership and coordination for the Division. The three units are responsible for programme planning and personnel management; publications, outreach, and intergovernmental support; and strengthening the Division's major demographic databases and data portals.
5. The Division is led by a Director at D2 level, who reports to the Under-Secretary-General and is supported by two branch chiefs at D1 level, and a front office headed by a P5. The Division has 41 approved regular budget posts for 2025, comprising 29 professional and higher-level, and 12 general service posts.
6. At the time of the audit, there were nine vacancies in the Division, including four posts vacant for over 12 months, two vacant for between 6 and 12 months, and the remaining vacant for less than 6 months. Additionally, one post was on loan within DESA, and three posts were loaned to other sections within the Division. The Division indicated that the prolonged vacancies were largely attributable to the Secretariat-wide hiring freeze and liquidity constraints.

7. The Division budget is funded through both regular and extrabudgetary resources. The combined budget was \$7.5 million in 2023, \$8.2 million in 2024, and \$7.7 million in 2025. Staff positions accounted for 90 per cent of the regular budget in 2024 and 2025.

Table 1: **Regular budget and extrabudgetary resources in thousands of United States dollars**

<b>Year</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>
Regular budget	<b>7,064.8</b>	<b>7,666.9</b>	<b>7,744.6</b>
Post	6,848.8	7,384.4	7,462.5
Non-post	216.0	282.1	282.1
Extrabudgetary	<b>477.0</b>	<b>545.1</b>	<b>13.5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,541.8</b>	<b>8,212.0</b>	<b>7,758.1</b>

Source: Proposed programme budgets for DESA – A/79/6 (Sect.9)

8. The Population Division uses a combination of enterprise systems and division-specific tools to manage its work. It uses Umoja for human resources, finance, and project administration, and the Umoja Strategic Management Application (SMA) to record and monitor programme performance indicators. Analytical outputs are produced using internal estimation platforms and statistical software, while draft publications and peer-review exchanges are shared through network drives and SharePoint. Data and reports are disseminated through the Division’s website, Data Portal, and downloadable files, but knowledge management remains decentralized, relying mainly on shared folders and email rather than a unified repository.

9. Comments provided by DESA are incorporated in italics.

## **II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY**

10. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the management of the DESA subprogramme on population in delivering its mandated objectives.

11. This audit was included in the 2025 risk-based work plan of OIOS to provide assurance on the adequacy of the management of the Population Division within DESA.

12. OIOS conducted this audit from May to October 2025. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2023 to 31 May 2025. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risk areas within the Division, including: (a) work planning; (b) work plan implementation; (c) performance monitoring; and (d) resource management.

13. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews with key personnel, (b) review of relevant documentation, (c) assessment of data management systems used for uploading datasets and generating demographic projections, as well as the Data Portal and website used to publicly share the Division’s analytical products; (d) review of datasets and outputs, including a comparison against the Division’s analyst manual to assess the integrity of the underlying data and the reliability of the information presented; and (e) sample testing of demographic datasets from six countries from each region using judgmental sampling.

14. To assess the reliability of data pertaining to the Division’s activities, OIOS compared information from divisional and section workplans, Umoja SMA, Population Division applications such as the Data Portal, and published outputs for consistency. Sample testing was performed to verify the accuracy and

completeness of reported information. Based on the review, OIOS determined that the data was sufficiently reliable to address the audit objective

15. The audit was conducted in accordance with the Global Internal Audit Standards.

### **III. AUDIT RESULTS**

#### **A. Work planning**

The Division's planning process needed improvement to support efficient output delivery

16. Results-based management in the United Nations Secretariat requires coherent planning across all levels, with outputs aligned from strategic frameworks to individual staff workplans. Managers are required to cascade objectives, risks, and performance indicators throughout the Organization to ensure accountability. Divisional and section workplans should translate higher-level goals into clearly defined roles and responsibilities, document staff contributions to shared outputs for transparency, and include measurable indicators to track timeliness, quality, and relevance.

17. The Population Division developed division and section workplans that guided its outputs and deliverables. However, there were no documented work planning instructions or procedures to ensure consistency or alignment across levels. As a result, section workplans varied in structure and level of detail, and three sections and two units lacked workplans for certain years, while one had none at all. The absence of a defined planning framework was also reflected at the individual level, where staff workplans were approved after the halfway point of the performance cycle, indicating that planning processes were not sequenced and finalized in time to guide implementation.

18. There was no documented evidence that workplans were formally reviewed or approved at either the section or division level. While management explained that workplans were discussed during division and branch meetings, these discussions were not documented to confirm a review or approval process. In addition, several deliverables listed in the divisional workplan were not reflected in the corresponding section plans, and vice versa, and outputs were often recorded under different names across planning levels, making it challenging to trace accountability and confirm whether divisional deliverables had been operationalized at the section level. In some cases, section workplans did not specify the activities contributing to divisional outputs, and shared outputs lacked clarity on roles, responsibilities, and delivery timelines across collaborating sections. Although management stated that shared responsibilities were discussed during senior staff meetings, no reference to these discussions was reflected in the nine sets of meeting minutes reviewed for 2025.

19. Furthermore, section workplans did not include key performance indicators (KPIs), and the KPIs reflected at the divisional level were mostly aggregated outcome measures that were not directly linked to specific outputs or activities in the division or section workplans. These included indicators such as an increase in external citations of the Division's publications or an increase in the number of Member States benefiting from evidence-based population policies. While relevant at a strategic level, such indicators do not provide measurable criteria for assessing the timeliness, quality, or completion of individual deliverables, such as technical papers, datasets, expert group meetings, or reports.

20. Inconsistent reflection of deliverables across plans reduced monitoring of section and staff contributions to divisional outputs, while the absence of measurable indicators limited the Division's ability to assess progress, ensure timely delivery, and take corrective action. For example, several analytical

publications were released later than planned, increasing reputational and operational risks and limiting management's ability to verify progress or take timely corrective action.

**(1) DESA Population Division should strengthen the work planning process by establishing workplan instructions, ensuring consistent alignment between the division and sections' workplans, clearly documenting sections' contributions to shared outputs, and incorporating indicators that support effective monitoring and accountability**

*DESA accepted recommendation 1 and stated that the Population Division would address it through the development of the 2026 workplans and regular quarterly milestone reviews, with lessons learned applied in the 2027 workplan cycle.*

#### Risk management integration in divisional planning and operations was informal and limited

21. The United Nations enterprise risk management and internal control policy require risk management to be incorporated into business processes and integrated within operational processes such as strategic planning, operational and financial management, and performance measurement.

22. While the Population Division contributed to the development of the DESA risk register, the departmental risks were broadly defined and not tailored to subprogrammes, with risk management centralized in DESA's Executive Office. Within the Division, risk discussions took place informally during senior staff meetings; however, there was no standardized process, template, or methodology to document these discussions or systematically integrate them into divisional processes. As a result, operational risks specific to the Division were not formally identified or linked to mitigation measures. These risks were related to extrabudgetary funding, data quality, sustainability of the Division's statistical and data-processing systems, and human resources.

23. Without a structured risk management process, significant operational risks may be under-recognized and inadequately managed, weakening the Division's ability to anticipate and mitigate factors that could affect the quality and timeliness of outputs and undermine accountability for results.

**(2) DESA Population Division should incorporate risk management into divisional work processes and ensure continuous monitoring and management of risks at all levels within the Division.**

*DESA accepted recommendation 2 and stated that the Population Division would include risk considerations in team workplans starting in 2026, monitor and adjust risks during 2026 to inform the 2027 workplans, and systematically document risk management discussions, including through a dedicated agenda item at senior staff meetings held at least quarterly*

## **B. Programme implementation**

#### The Population Division could embed metadata in the demographic datasets

24. DESA Statistics Division standards require statistical datasets to be accompanied by standardized machine-readable metadata describing data definitions, methodology, units of measurement, source references, and update frequency, to promote transparency, comparability, and interoperability across the United Nations statistical system. Embedding metadata within datasets or providing direct reference links enhances traceability and aligns with the United Nations Data Strategy (2020–2030) and international data governance standards.

25. The Population Division publishes major demographic datasets, including the World Population Prospects, International Migrant Stock, World Fertility and World Contraceptive Use, accompanied by methodological documentation. However, the extent to which metadata was embedded within dataset files varied across outputs. A review of four datasets, using country-level extracts for six sampled countries from each region, showed that while the World Contraceptive Use 2024 dataset included embedded metadata in its downloadable files, the other datasets reviewed contained only data values without standardized embedded metadata fields such as definitions, units of measurement, source references, or reference periods.

26. These differences in how metadata were presented resulted in inconsistencies in documentation quality across datasets. A review of stakeholder correspondence revealed recurring questions on metadata completeness, methodological transparency, data reconciliation, and indicator definitions, underscoring the need for clearer documentation and standardized data presentation.

27. While the Population Division ensures that methodological information is publicly available, the lack of standardized embedded metadata may limit machine readability, interoperability, and automated data exchange with other systems. Although data integrity is not affected, these gaps reduce usability and consistency across datasets. The Division acknowledged the inconsistencies in embedding metadata in the demographic datasets and explained that embedding additional metadata would require increased server capacity and associated cost implications, which are not currently feasible, considering current liquidity constraints.

#### Need to strengthen controls over knowledge management practices in the Division

28. United Nations policies on record-keeping and data management<sup>1</sup> emphasize effective records management to preserve institutional memory and ensure knowledge continuity. Consistent with this, the Joint Inspection Unit<sup>2</sup> recommended a knowledge management framework to promote systematic documentation for institutional continuity, transparency, and good governance.

29. While some sections had documented procedures for their outputs, such as analysts' manuals, knowledge management practices across the Division remained inconsistent. A few sections were still in the process of documenting their procedures, while others had none. Knowledge sharing between sections was also limited and uncoordinated. A review of current knowledge management practices and interviews with staff confirmed that there was no division-wide oversight or requirement to centrally store information; instead, documentation was maintained within individual teams.

30. These inconsistencies extended beyond documentation to knowledge sharing and collaboration. For instance, although inter-agency activities and joint initiatives were discussed in senior staff meetings, there was no mechanism to document, store, or disseminate lessons or outcomes from these discussions. As a result, important information from stakeholder interactions was not accessible to all staff involved in related work, limiting continuity, coordination, and institutional learning. Similarly, engagement with external stakeholders varied across sections; some maintained active networks and regular exchanges, while others had limited engagement. Examples of teams that demonstrated a more structured approach to knowledge management included the team supporting migration statistics, which maintained a shared inter-agency network database, and the section supporting activities of the Commission on Population and Development, which had an organized archive of guidance and correspondence accessible to staff over multiple years.

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<sup>1</sup> ST/SGB/2007/5 and UN Secretariat ICT Technical Procedure on Data Classification

<sup>2</sup> JIU/REP/2016/10

**(3) DESA Population Division should establish and implement a standardized knowledge management framework across the Division to ensure systematic documentation, preservation, and accessibility to institutional knowledge.**

*DESA accepted recommendation 3 and stated that the Population Division would establish a common SharePoint folder structure, particularly for shared workstreams and areas that require cross-team sharing. Given resource constraints, systematizing documentation of research and data production would be addressed later, building on existing standardized documentation tools.*

Quality assurance and peer review mechanisms for analytical products were inconsistent

31. The United Nations Policy Manual for Publications (2022) and the DESA Editorial Board Guidelines (2023) require analytical products to undergo systematic and documented quality assurance and peer review to ensure methodological soundness, credibility, and alignment with mandates and publication policies.

32. Between 2023 and 2025, the Population Division issued multiple analytical products, including major demographic reports, data booklets, and technical papers. However, despite the volume and visibility of these outputs, the Division had not yet finalized and implemented its draft quality assurance framework, which remained in draft as of July 2025. As a result, quality assurance practices were inconsistently applied, with no formal mechanism to track or verify the completion of peer-review requirements. While internal peer review was sought for both publication prospectuses<sup>3</sup> and final reports, the incorporation of reviewer comments was inconsistent, with some outputs reflecting feedback received as required by the guidelines, while others did not. Similarly, although external peer reviewers were identified in the prospectuses, the process of collecting and incorporating external input was inconsistent. Interviews with stakeholders confirmed that although external reviewers were consulted, their feedback was not always obtained, often because requests were made late in the publication process.

33. Additionally, gaps were observed in publications dissemination practices. Most publications were produced in a single language and were not fully accessible to persons with disabilities, contrary to the Editorial Board's policies on multilingual dissemination and accessibility. The Division indicated plans to use the Adobe Acrobat accessibility checker as a cost-effective tool to enhance accessibility, while noting that multilingual compliance remained dependent on resource availability.

**(4) DESA Population Division should implement a quality assurance and peer review framework to ensure analytical products are systematically reviewed, documented, and aligned with the DESA Editorial Board and United Nations publication requirements.**

*DESA accepted recommendation 4 and stated that the Population Division planned to finalize and implement its draft framework on the review of publications, including monitoring of the timeline for each step in the process.*

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<sup>3</sup> Initial concept notes prepared before drafting

## C. Performance monitoring

### Performance monitoring in the Population Division needed improvement

34. In line with ST/SGB/2018/3,<sup>4</sup> programme managers are required to establish effective monitoring mechanisms to measure performance, ensure the achievement of results, and use performance information to support decision-making and resource efficiency.

35. The Population Division established annual workplans, which provided a consolidated record of planned outputs across sections and branches. The Division also tracked the progress of programme budget results and related deliverables through Umoja SMA. However, as indicated earlier in the report, the divisional and sectional workplans did not include measurable indicators against which progress and performance could be monitored. Also, monitoring practices varied across sections, leading to inconsistent tracking of progress and achievement of outputs. For instance, while divisional outputs were marked as completed upon delivery, there was no evidence that implementation progress was systematically tracked or updated throughout the year. Some sections indicated timelines for outputs, but there was no evidence of tracking against those timelines, while others did not specify performance measures or quality criteria. Performance discussions at senior staff meetings focused mainly on forward planning rather than on reviewing ongoing activities.

36. Consequently, management was unable to detect delays in advance and take corrective action. There was a recurring pattern of late delivery that could be attributed to gaps in monitoring arrangements. These included delays in completing planned deliverables and providing timely updates to programme-level reporting.

37. Implementation of recommendation 1 would help establish measurable indicators needed for performance tracking. However, to improve monitoring, a complementary measure is required to institutionalize regular progress reviews and standardized reporting practices.

**(5) DESA Population Division should establish a structured performance monitoring mechanism with standardized reporting and periodic progress reviews to ensure timely follow-up and corrective action on deliverables.**

*DESA accepted recommendation 5 and stated that the Population Division planned to organize dedicated quarterly meetings focused on programme monitoring and systematically document work-planning discussions held during senior staff meetings, in coordination with the implementation of recommendation 1.*

### Feedback and evaluation mechanisms were not systematically applied to inform planning and improvement

38. In accordance with ST/SGB/2018/3, as well as the administrative instruction on evaluation in the United Nations Secretariat<sup>5</sup> and UNEG norms,<sup>6</sup> evaluation findings, lessons learned and performance data

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<sup>4</sup> Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation

<sup>5</sup> ST/AI/2021/3

<sup>6</sup> The United Nations Evaluation Group is an inter-agency professional network of evaluation offices across the United Nations system that establishes common norms and standards to guide evaluation practice and use across the Organization - <https://www.unevaluation.org/>

should be systematically used to inform planning, prioritization and programme improvement, thereby enhancing the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of programmes.

39. The Division relied on Google Scholar citations and website analytics to gauge the reach of its publications and collect feedback on their use. In addition, some sections maintained feedback mechanisms, including a continuously updated lessons learned document on the activities of the Commission on Population and Development and correspondence with stakeholders via a central email channel. However, other sections lacked an established feedback mechanism, and existing feedback sources were not systematically analyzed or linked to planning and improvement processes. For instance, a review of 30 of 124 stakeholder correspondences received between February and December 2024 found no evidence that the queries were systematically categorized, analyzed, or translated into improvements in user guidance or production processes. Recurrent themes such as metadata access and variant interpretation were handled on a case-by-case basis through references to existing documentation, but without records of internal discussion or follow-up actions to reduce repeat inquiries or enhance efficiency in future cycles.

40. These gaps stemmed primarily from the absence of an established procedure for consolidating, analyzing, and applying evaluation findings, lessons learned, and stakeholder feedback. As a result, feedback data remained fragmented, and its use depended on individual initiative rather than an institutionalized process, leading to missed opportunities for continuous improvement and enhanced user relevance.

**(6) DESA Population Division should establish a structured mechanism to systematically integrate feedback into programme planning and implementation processes to enhance performance and accountability.**

*DESA accepted recommendation 6 and stated that the Population Division would systematically document the consolidation, analysis, and application of evaluation findings, lessons learned, and stakeholder feedback into programme planning and implementation processes, including through senior staff meetings and the annual preparation of the programme plan*

## **D. Resource management**

Controls over consultant and individual contractor resources were generally adequate

41. A review of the Division's hiring and management of consultants and individual contractors confirmed that these engagements were generally carried out in accordance with the requirements of ST/AI/2013/4,<sup>7</sup> including documented terms of reference, competitive selection processes, and proper approval of contract extensions. Between 2023 and 2025, the Population Division engaged five individual consultants and contractors under nine contracts totalling \$271,365, all funded from extrabudgetary resources. All consultancy work was performed remotely and did not require travel. In addition, four consultants and individual contractors were engaged under the regular budget during the same period, with total expenditures of \$98,716. Contract files contained the required terms of reference, selection justifications, and approval records, and in each case, at least three candidates were shortlisted from a geographically diverse pool.

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<sup>7</sup> Administrative Instructions on consultants and individual contractors

### There were gaps with mandatory training

42. The United Nations human resources policies require that human resources be managed in a manner that ensures adequate staffing capacity, accountability, and alignment with organizational priorities.

43. Amid United Nations system-wide liquidity constraints, the Population Division had a vacancy rate of 22 per cent as of September 2025, with 9 posts unfilled, including 4 being vacant for more than 12 months. Recruitment processes were often prolonged, with half of the selections since 2023 exceeding the 120-day benchmark, and one exceeding 800 days. These staffing shortages led to delivery delays and reduced deliverables, with some outputs shifted from annual to biennial release. The Division also relied heavily on temporary appointments, including in one case where contracts were repeatedly extended with shortened break periods, which is inconsistent with the provisions of the temporary appointment regulations. The Division management explained that heavy workload pressures, particularly during preparations for the meeting of the Commission on Population and Development, led to reliance on temporary arrangements and exceptions to the required break-in-service rules.

44. There were also gaps in staff performance management processes. For instance, in the 2025-2026 cycle, only 35.5 per cent of staff had finalized their workplans by May 2025, although prior cycles achieved a 100 per cent completion rate at year-end. While the 31 May workplan-completion deadline is advisory, timely completion is essential to enable monitoring and feedback throughout the performance cycle.

45. Compliance with mandatory training was low, at 55 per cent overall, with only 22 per cent of staff completing the newly introduced Disability Inclusion Strategy course. Such weaknesses in performance management and training compliance may reduce accountability and monitoring of staff contributions, resulting in inefficiencies

**(7) DESA Population Division should take additional measures to ensure compliance with mandatory training requirements for its staff.**

*DESA accepted recommendation 7 and stated that the Population Division would continue regular follow-up efforts to ensure full compliance with mandatory training requirements.*

### Projects funded through extrabudgetary sources complied with donor agreement requirements

46. In accordance with ST/SGB/2018/3 and the United Nations Secretariat Internal Control Framework, programme managers must ensure that all externally funded projects are implemented, monitored, and reported in compliance with approved donor agreements, with formal authorization for extensions and adequate documentation to demonstrate financial and administrative compliance.

47. While the Population Division's regular budget remained relatively stable during the audit period, it adopted resource mobilization strategies to support selected outputs. These included extrabudgetary funding from the Gates Foundation, which supported the Making Family Planning Count project since 2014, while other initiatives, such as work on population ageing, urbanization estimates, and methodological development, were financed through various sources, including collaborations with the European Commission Joint Research Centre and academic partners. The Division also sought funding for future Commission on Population and Development sessions through outreach to Permanent Missions.

48. A review of the Making Family Planning Count project, with a budget of approximately \$2 million, confirmed compliance with donor agreement requirements. The initial project end date of 30 April 2024 was extended twice to February 2026. A review of project documentation showed that project amendments and reporting were managed in accordance with donor requirements.

#### **IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

49. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of DESA for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

Internal Audit Division  
Office of Internal Oversight Services

## STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

## Audit of the management of the Department of Social and Economic Affairs subprogramme on population

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical <sup>8</sup> / Important <sup>9</sup>	C/ O <sup>10</sup>	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date <sup>11</sup>
1	DESA Population Division should strengthen the work planning process by establishing workplan instructions, ensuring consistent alignment between division and sections' workplans, clearly documenting sections' contributions to shared outputs, and incorporating indicators that support effective monitoring and accountability	Important	O	Receipt of documents outlining strengthened work planning and monitoring processes in the Division.	31 March 2027
2	DESA Population Division should incorporate risk management into divisional work processes and ensure continuous monitoring and management of risks at all levels within the Division.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of integrated risk management and continuous risk monitoring across the Division.	30 June 2027
3	DESA Population Division should establish and implement a standardized knowledge management framework across the Division to ensure systematic documentation, preservation, and accessibility to institutional knowledge.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of an established and implemented standardized knowledge management framework in the Division.	31 December 2027
4	DESA Population Division should implement a quality assurance and peer review framework to ensure analytical products are systematically reviewed, documented, and aligned with the DESA Editorial Board and United Nations publication requirements.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of implementation of quality assurance and peer review framework.	31 December 2026

<sup>8</sup> Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

<sup>9</sup> Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

<sup>10</sup> Please note that the value C denotes closed recommendations, whereas O refers to open recommendations.

<sup>11</sup> Date provided by DESA in response to recommendations.

## STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

## Audit of the management of the Department of Social and Economic Affairs subprogramme on population

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical <sup>8</sup> / Important <sup>9</sup>	C/ O <sup>10</sup>	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date <sup>11</sup>
5	DESA Population Division should establish a structured performance monitoring mechanism with standardized reporting and periodic progress reviews to ensure timely follow-up and corrective action on deliverables.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of a structured performance monitoring system with standardized reporting and periodic progress reviews.	31 March 2027
6	DESA Population Division should establish a structured mechanism to systematically integrate feedback into programme planning and implementation processes to enhance performance and accountability.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of a structured mechanism that systematically integrates feedback into planning and implementation.	31 March 2027
7	DESA Population Division should take additional measures to ensure compliance with mandatory training requirements for its staff.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence confirming implementation of additional measures to ensure full staff compliance with mandatory training requirements across the Division.	31 December 2026

# **APPENDIX I**

## **Management Response**

## Management Response

## Audit of the management of the Department of Social and Economic Affairs subprogramme on population

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical <sup>1</sup> / Important <sup>2</sup>	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	DESA Population Division should strengthen the work planning process by establishing workplan instructions, ensuring consistent alignment between division and section plans, clearly documenting sections' contributions to shared outputs, and incorporating indicators that support effective monitoring and accountability	Important	Yes	Director/PMU head/senior staff	Mar-2027	PD will address this recommendation as we develop the workplan instructions and workplans in January 2026 and implement regular check in at quarterly milestones. Lessons learned in 2026, including any required refinements, will be applied for the development of the 2027 workplans.
2	DESA Population Division should incorporate risk management into divisional work processes and ensure continuous monitoring and management of risks at all levels within the Division.	Important	Yes	Director/PMU head/senior staff	Jun-2027	PD will include risk considerations in team workplans starting from 2026 and monitor management of risks and any required adjustments in 2026 to feed into the 2027 workplans. PD will also systematically document in more detail the discussions on risk management that take place in senior staff meetings, in addition to including a dedicated senior staff agenda item on risk management at least quarterly.
3	DESA Population Division should establish and implement a standardized knowledge management framework across the Division to ensure systematic	Important	Yes	Director/PMU head/senior staff	Dec-2027	PD will take steps to establish a common structure of SharePoint folders across the Division by Jun-2026 (interim target date), particularly for workstreams

<sup>1</sup> Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

<sup>2</sup> Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

## Management Response

## Audit of the management of the Department of Social and Economic Affairs subprogramme on population

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical <sup>1</sup> / Important <sup>2</sup>	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
	documentation, preservation, and accessibility to institutional knowledge.					common to each section (e.g. administration, meeting planning, talking points) and where sharing across teams is particularly relevant (e.g. interagency mechanisms). Given resource constraints, systematizing documentation of research and data production would be undertaken in a second phase in 2026 and 2027. This would build on work already done – for instance, the highly standardized documentation of country data sources in the Data Archive, DemoData and Microdata.
4	DESA Population Division should implement a quality assurance and peer review framework to ensure analytical products are systematically reviewed, documented, and aligned with the DESA Editorial Board and United Nations publication requirements.	Important	Yes	Director/POSU head/PMU head	Dec-2026	PD plans to finalize and implement its draft framework on the review process for publications, including monitoring the timeline for each of the steps.
5	DESA Population Division should establish a structured performance monitoring mechanism with standardized reporting and periodic progress reviews to ensure timely follow-up and corrective action on deliverables.	Important	Yes	Director/PMU head/senior staff	Mar-2027	PD plans to organize dedicated quarterly meetings within the Division focused on programme monitoring. PD also plans to systematically document in more detail the discussions on work planning that take place at the senior

## Management Response

## Audit of the management of the Department of Social and Economic Affairs subprogramme on population

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical <sup>1</sup> / Important <sup>2</sup>	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
						staff meetings. This is related to the implementation of rec #1.
6	DESA Population Division should establish a structured mechanism to systematically integrate feedback into programme planning and implementation processes to enhance performance and accountability.	Important	Yes	Director/PMU head	Mar-2027	PD plans to systematically document the consolidation, analysis and application of evaluation findings, lessons learned and stakeholder feedback into programme planning and implementation processes, including in senior staff meetings and in the annual preparation of the programme plan.
7	DESA Population Division should take additional measures to ensure compliance with mandatory training requirements for its staff.	Important	Yes	PMU head	Dec-2026	PD plans to continue regular follow-up efforts towards ensuring compliance with mandatory training requirements.