

MINUTES

Executive Committee Meeting



Tue 26 November 2024, Virtual

1. Co-chairs' welcome and introduction

The Executive Committee (ExCom) co-chairs:

- 1.1 welcomed all participants to the meeting and thanked the ECW Secretariat for preparing comprehensive background documents, including meeting presentations and a written Executive Director's update which were shared ahead of time;
- 1.2 highlighted the critical risk of ECW not meeting its financial targets for the 2023–26 Strategy period, which could significantly impact the organization's ability to deliver quality education to children and adolescents in crisis situations;
- 1.3 emphasized the need for improved access to resources, enhanced cooperation with national and international development partners, and a clear prioritization for the use of these resources;
- 1.4 noted two items under AOB for this meeting – (a) the ongoing selection process for the new High-Level Steering Group (HLSG) Chair, and (b) proposed meeting dates for ExCom meetings in 2025;
- 1.5 asked participants for consent to record the meeting. No objections were raised.

[Note: See Annex A for the list of participants]

2. Executive Director's Update

The ECW Executive Director:

- 2.1 thanked the ExCom members for their strong commitment to ECW's mission and resource mobilization efforts;
- 2.2 welcomed back Corinne Duriaux, Switzerland's ExCom representative, following her maternity leave;
- 2.3 extended appreciation to all ExCom members for their collective efforts in resource mobilization, including during the High-Level Financing Conference held in Geneva, Switzerland in 2023, which resulted in excellent outcomes;
- 2.4 thanked Denmark for becoming the first contributor to ECW's climate change strategy *Right Here, Right Now* with a US \$6 million contribution, enabling the launch of climate-related anticipatory action programming in pilot countries: Pakistan and Somalia;

- 2.5 recognized Switzerland for its bold \$30 million contribution to ECW this year, as well as for co-hosting the High-Level Financing Conference last year and its ongoing commitment to the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies;
- 2.6 acknowledged the United Kingdom's recent contribution of an additional £10 million (approximately \$12 million), earmarked for the Sudan refugee crisis response;
- 2.7 noted that these substantial contributions from ExCom members continue to strengthen ECW's impact;
- 2.8 highlighted the progress made under the current strategy, with \$165.3 million in investments since August 2024 across 16 countries and \$220.6 million since January 2024, targeting 1.9 million children and adolescents (58% girls, 8% children with disabilities, 10% early childhood learners, 13% refugees and 31% IDPs);
- 2.9 stressed that these achievements are the result of a strong partnership between ExCom and the Secretariat, with feedback and input from ExCom members playing a vital role in shaping and strengthening ECW's programmes;
- 2.10 highlighted the shared responsibility of resource mobilization between ExCom, HLSG, and the Secretariat, and mentioned that ECW's Chief of Partnerships will speak further on this topic during the meeting;
- 2.11 concluded with thanks to ExCom members for their professionalism, alignment, and dedication, noting that their collaboration has been integral to ECW's success.

[Note: See Annex C for the Executive Director's presentation on ECW investments-updated with information on ECE]

3. 2025 Annual Work Plan

The ECW Chief of Strategy, Planning and Accountability:

3.1 provided an overview of the 2025 Annual Workplan, including:

- a) a recap of the strategic priorities, planning process, and approach;
- b) a 2024 progress update on ongoing, completed and on-track deliverables;
- c) the 2025 ambition and flagship themes: stronger coordination at the humanitarian-development nexus, enhanced localization and community participation, and strengthened quality programming;
- d) next steps.

3.2 invited the ExCom to approve the 2025 Annual Workplan.

[Note: See Annex D for 2025 Annual Work Plan Presentation]

In discussion, the ExCom:

- 3.3 congratulated the ECW team on the impressive progress achieved despite challenging operating contexts;

- 3.4 highlighted resource mobilization to meet funding targets while maintaining a strong focus on quality programming in 2025, including support for teachers, gender transformation, and inclusion of children with disabilities amid financial challenges and new emergencies;
- 3.5 encouraged ECW setting a percentage-based funding target for disability inclusion to ensure measurable benchmarks and accountability for the Global Disability Summit in 2025;
- 3.6 inquired whether climate change, child protection, early childhood education, and gender equality remain as a priorities for 2025, and sought clarification on the difference between a flagship theme and a priority;
- 3.7 inquired about the progress and finalization of the complementarity note between ECW and GPE;
- 3.8 welcomed the focus on strengthening the FER window and requested clarity on the criteria guiding FER prioritization, particularly in targeting the hardest-to-reach learners and forgotten crises, as well as the approach to balancing a larger number of smaller FERs versus fewer larger FERs;
- 3.9 highlighted the unique comparative advantage of ECW in fostering stronger coordination at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, emphasizing the importance of linking this to working on exit strategies and presenting strong evidence of added value ahead of the upcoming replenishment campaign;
- 3.10 called for an update on the Finance Observatory and next steps;
- 3.11 encouraged learning exchange and further collaboration with Acceleration Facility (AF) partners focused on addressing multi-faceted marginalization and integrating lessons into ECW programming;
- 3.12 advocated for tracking the implementation of commitments made at the Global Refugee Forum, particularly regarding inclusion and transition pathways for refugees, and linking ECW efforts to the mega-pledges;
- 3.13 welcomed the focus on teacher well-being and professional development, encouraging ECW to address systemic gaps, assess teacher well-being from a Maslow's Hierarchy of needs perspective, paying attention to basics such as contracts and salaries, and stronger collaboration with other donors and organizations who are investing in the same areas to avoid duplication;
- 3.14 proposed exploring the establishment of an international fund to support teachers in contexts where governments are unable to pay salaries and called for alignment with the recommendations put forward in the *UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession*.
- 3.15 emphasized the importance of localization and suggested leveraging existing structures or creating concrete mechanisms to ensure civil society, teacher unions, and youth organizations' participation at the country level.

- 3.16 encouraged ECW and partners to support the African Union's newly adopted education strategy running until 2035, noting its significance for the region;
- 3.17 highlighted the need for stronger collaboration with other donors and organizations to optimize in-country investments and address disconnects, as we are experiencing funding gaps in education emergencies;
- 3.18 called for broader discussions on organizational governance to ensure equal participation in ECW bodies such as ExCom and HLSG and increasing representation from local voices referencing insights from OMAG discussions;
- 3.19 supported ECW's consortium approach at the country level and suggested revisiting conversations on grantee diversification to enhance technical capacity and improve localization outcomes;
- 3.20 emphasized the importance of increasing representation from local voices in ExCom discussions to strengthen localization efforts, noting that OMAG discussions are already addressing this area.

In response, the ECW Executive Director and Chief of Strategy, Planning and Accountability:

- 3.21 reaffirmed ECW's commitment towards strengthening its support for children with disabilities, including the targeting and measurement of reach figures;
- 3.22 highlighted significant strides in gender equality programming, noting that 58% of children targeted under new ECW programmes approved in 2024 were girls. In particular, the campaign for girls in Afghanistan has garnered global attention and new strategic partnerships were initiated through the AF window to advance gender equality through the empowerment, human rights education, and mental health and psychosocial support of Sudanese refugee girls. This strong emphasis on gender equality was welcomed by Canada during the last HLSG meeting;
- 3.23 reported that 10% of children targeted under new ECW programmes approved in 2024 were children at the level of Early Childhood Education (ECE) emphasizing the consensus that ECE forms the foundation for learning and well-being;
- 3.24 reaffirmed efforts on refugee support, stating that ECW is working diligently to meet its commitments. It was noted that, as highlighted by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees during the HLSG meeting, ECW has been a significant provider of support for the Sudan Refugee Crisis response;
- 3.25 confirmed the approval of the complementarity note developed by GPE and ECW, led by the ECW Deputy Director and GPE's Partnerships Manager¹.

¹ **UPDATE:** The final version of the ECW-GPE Complementarity Note was circulated to the ExCom on 26 November at 4:09 PM EST. In terms of next steps, ECW will work with GPE to produce a public-facing shorter and more accessible version and will also make the note available to partners engaged in ECW's respective governance structures.

- 3.26 clarified the difference between a 'flagship theme' and a 'priority', wherein the former refers to priorities set to gain more momentum; and explained that while only three key flagship themes are highlighted in the work plan, additional priorities exist beyond these themes; and
- 3.27 reassured ExCom members that climate change remains a key priority in the 2025 work plan, with flexibility to elevate it as a fourth flagship theme if needed;
- 3.28 acknowledged the feedback provided by ExCom on the annual work plan and committed to sharing a tracker, outlining how the comments and suggestions from this meeting will be integrated into the final work plan.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS/DECISIONS

- 3.29 The ExCom approved the 2025 ECW Annual Work Plan.

4. 2025 Budget

The ECW Chief of Finance and Operations:

- 4.1 provided an update on the 2025 budget based on questions raised during the budget briefing on 12 November, ensuring clarity and alignment with ExCom's concerns;
- 4.2 presented an overview of the budget allocations to the funding windows for 2023-26, as well as the status of MYRP, FER and AF investments, including their financial targets, funding disbursements, implementation, and regional focus.
- 4.3 outlined progress on the 2024 operational budget, highlighting expected variances in its implementation such as reduced costs due to staff vacancies and lower-than-expected operational expenses, in line with UNICEF's standard processes. Quarterly financial adjustments are conducted to reallocate funds efficiently;
- 4.4 invited the ExCom to approve the 2025 operational budget of \$16.3 million, which is slightly lower than the previous year and below 7% of planned programme expenditure. The main cost driver is staff costs with an allocation of 67% for a team of 40 staff members, including two secondments and three experts on loan;
- 4.5 announced the upcoming engagement of a Climate Programme Manager as an expert on loan in 2025, underscoring the commitment to climate change as a priority.

[Note: See Annex E for the 2025 Budget Presentation]

In discussion, the ExCom:

- 4.6 thanked the Chief of Finance and Operations for an excellent presentation and expressed full support for the proposed budget, noting satisfaction with the allocation for external consultancy support to begin developing the next strategic plan;

- 4.7 suggested considering budget provisions for external support to assist with the replenishment process in 2026;
- 4.8 acknowledged and appreciated the UK's funding for the disability and inclusion Junior Professional Officer (JPO) in the ECW Secretariat and inquired about plans to ensure continuity in having a dedicated person for disability inclusion in the longer term;
- 4.9 sought clarification on the fee for logistical and diplomatic services for staff outside New York, asking if these refer to outposting costs, and requested an explanation of the lower UNICEF standard costs referenced in the presentation;
- 4.10 raised a strategic question about coordination with GPE for the next replenishment, emphasizing the importance of aligning timelines well to avoid competing for the same donor pool at the same time;
- 4.11 inquired about the consultancy focused on private sector donor engagement, asking for further details or examples of ECW's plans to explore partnerships with non-traditional donors.

In response, the ECW Chief of Finance and Operations:

- 4.12 noted that most questions and comments on replenishment would be addressed in the upcoming presentation on resource mobilization;
- 4.13 clarified that ECW covers fees for logistical and diplomatic services as well as the use of UNICEF office spaces for staff based outside New York, applying standard costs provided by UNICEF based on the position's level and location;
- 4.14 explained that actual costs for most ECW staff are lower than standard costs due to factors such as the number of dependents and utilization of accommodation allowance at their duty station;
- 4.15 addressed the topic of consultancies for resource mobilization, emphasizing that resource mobilization is a collective responsibility across the ECW team, as the fund was uniquely structured to involve all staff in this effort;
- 4.16 acknowledged the need for specialized capacity to target specific markets, particularly the private sector in North America, where ECW has faced challenges achieving a breakthrough despite past efforts; emphasized the importance of diversifying funding sources beyond existing donors to expand ECW's resource base.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS/DECISIONS

- 4.17 The ExCom approved the operational budget for 2025.

5. Resource Mobilization

ECW Chief of Strategic Partnerships:

- 5.1 introduced the objective of initiating discussions on resource mobilization post-2026, including the need for continued financing efforts to bridge as much as possible the remaining gap for the 2023–2026 Strategic Plan;
- 5.2 referred to the overview of ECW's financial status presented by the Chief of Finance and Operations, highlighting that ECW has mobilized 62% of the funding required for the current strategic plan and at the current expenditure levels, ECW has funding to meet the commitments outlined in the 2023-26 Strategic Plan;
- 5.3 presented a proposal for a 2026 Replenishment outlining key decisions required, recommending a timeline for planning (with four phases from early 2025 to 2026), and advancing strategic prioritization and focus.

[Note: See Annex F for the Resource Mobilization Presentation]

In discussion, the ExCom:

- 5.4 commended the presentation and emphasized strong support for organizations raising funds for education in crisis contexts, while acknowledging the challenges posed by a shifting donor landscape;
- 5.5 encouraged ECW to diversify its revenue streams by exploring non-traditional donors and private sector partnerships, commending progress made so far but emphasizing the need for further efforts in this area;
- 5.6 stressed the importance of strong governance and transparency in collaboration with UNICEF, noting that these are critical for successfully mobilizing additional funding;
- 5.7 reiterated the need for careful coordination with GPE to avoid overlap in replenishment timelines, suggesting further analysis to determine the optimal spacing between the two replenishments;
- 5.8 highlighted lessons learned from the previous replenishments of both ECW and GPE, advising against making radical changes unless absolutely necessary, as both organizations have not met their targets in the past;
- 5.9 recognized ECW's ongoing relevance, particularly given the increasing number of global conflicts, climate-related displacement, and other crises, and emphasized the importance of building a compelling case for continued investment;
- 5.10 suggested leveraging domestic investments in education as part of sustainability planning, particularly as governments transition out of conflict periods and assume greater responsibility for their education systems;
- 5.11 urged ECW to continue refining its messaging to donors, highlighting its critical role in addressing crises such as refugee displacement and natural disasters, while setting realistic funding targets that align with donor expectations;

- 5.12 commended ECW for its ability to respond to emerging crises effectively and stressed the need to present a compelling case for investment, reflecting both the organization's unique role and the global demand for education in emergencies.

In response, the ECW Chief of Strategic Partnerships:

- 5.13 emphasized that ECW like other specialized funds will continue to depend on traditional donors for meeting at least 80% of its funding needs while pursuing new and innovative approaches to mobilize additional funds by leveraging the political influence and outreach of HLSG to galvanize support from the private sector and philanthropic organisations;
- 5.14 highlighted efforts to explore sustainable financing models, citing successful initiatives like Switzerland's collaboration with cantonal banks and ongoing discussions in the UK with impact investment funds targeting climate and education, aiming to establish partnerships that benefit both businesses and children in crisis;
- 5.15 highlighted that the new ECW resource mobilization efforts for the post 2026 strategic plan must begin with the determination of a new financial ask by the ExCom that is realistic and aligned with the donor community expectations for ECW's impact and complementary role with other education funds and agencies;
- 5.16 requested a follow up meeting with the donor members of the ExCom to finalize this discussion towards determining the financial ask and timeline for the ECW replenishment in 2026. This will support ECW to start coordinating with GPE, planning its campaign, and putting in place the necessary capacity for successful resource mobilization.

6. Update on Hosting Arrangement and Hosting Review

The ECW Chief of Finance and Operations:

- 6.1 provided an update on the latest developments on the hosting arrangement and hosting review in line with the discussions during the HLSG meeting in September 2024;
- 6.2 shared that an update from the HLSG Chair on this subject will be circulated to the ExCom after the meeting;
- 6.3 presented the key aspects related to the hosting review process², including:
- a) a timeline of developments since 2018;
 - b) hosting options and solutions within the UN system;
 - c) criteria to considering when identifying an alternative host;
 - d) a strategic roadmap and step-by-step approach, e.g. reviewing case studies, drafting relevant criteria, drafting terms of references, etc.

[Note: See Annex G for Hosting Arrangement and Review Update Presentation]

² **UPDATE:** An update on the Hosting Review was shared on 16 December 2024 at 3:27 PM EST, requesting for feedback by 13 January 2025. Additionally, a meeting on the proposed preparations in line with the Hosting Review was held on 15 January.

In discussion, the ExCom:

- 6.4 noted the HLSG decision for the hosting review to be conducted in 2025 and requested a clear timeline for the review's commencement, along with finalized terms of reference;
- 6.5 commended the comprehensive criteria and preparation presented, while seeking clarification on whether the review is aimed at exploring alternative hosting options or confirming the suitability of the current hosting arrangement.

In response, the Chief of Finance and Operations:

- 6.6 addressed the question on the review's intent, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a transparent process guided by jointly agreed criteria to determine the best hosting arrangement for ECW; stressed that the ideal host would be the one that most effectively enables ECW to deliver on its mandate and highlighted the need for an open-minded, deliberate, and thorough approach to ensure the right decision is made;
- 6.7 reiterated that further information about the hosting arrangement will be shared within the week³. The timeline for the hosting review will be shared as soon as it is cleared by the HLSG Chair.

7. Operational Manual Update

The Chair of the Operational Manual Advisory Group:

- 7.1 presented an overview of the process of updating the Operational Manual, noting the aim to finalize the Manual by April 2025, followed by a review mechanism to evaluate its effectiveness in terms of clarity and implementation after six months to a year;
- 7.2 recalled the early areas of focus, highlighting that reaching consensus on the division of labour between HLSG and ExCom remains a high priority;
- 7.3 highlighted that the remaining outstanding issues, including the composition of ExCom and HLSG—governance practices, and operational processes such as meeting frequency, agenda timelines, and decision-making procedures—will be addressed through an in-person discussion in London in January. The goal is to finalise the update of the Operational Manual by March 2025 for ExCom endorsement followed by submission to HLSG for approval in April 2025;

[Note: See Annex H for Operational Manual Update Presentation]

In addition, the ECW Deputy Director:

- 7.4 flagged that HLSG meetings are closely tied to major events like the UN General Assembly UNGA in September and the World Bank Spring Meetings in April, leaving limited flexibility to adjust their timing;

³ **UPDATE:** A letter from the HLSG Chair Rt Hon Gordon Brown together with the final version of the Hosting Arrangement was shared with the ExCom on 26 November, at 7:15 PM EST, indicating a deadline for objections by 6 December.

- 7.5 highlighted the importance of HLSG retaining its role in strategic decision-making by approving high-level elements such as annual priorities and the overall investment window envelope during its meetings. This distinction ensures that HLSG focuses on overarching guidance rather than operational details;
- 7.6 clarified that ExCom is responsible for approving the more detailed annual work plan and budget, using the high-level priorities and overall investment window amount approved by HLSG to inform its decisions, maintaining a clear division of responsibilities between the two governance bodies.

In discussion, the ExCom:

- 7.7 emphasized the importance of maintaining focus on critical issues while addressing operational details, ensuring that ExCom fully understands the current situation regarding ECW's inability to accept new funding;
- 7.8 requested a clear outline of the steps, procedures, and timelines necessary to restore ECW's capacity to absorb funding, including any considerations related to the processes or timelines discussed earlier, to avoid losing sight of this urgent matter.

In response, the ECW Deputy Director:

- 7.9 confirmed that the latest version of the Hosting Arrangement will be shared with ExCom this week for their non-objection; assuming there are no objections to the Hosting Arrangement, it can then be signed by the HLSG Chair. This will enable UNICEF to resume processing funds;
- 7.10 clarified that the current blockage on further contributions being processed by UNICEF is solely due to the pending approval of the Hosting Arrangement; recommended that ExCom endorse the Hosting Arrangement. This will allow the HLSG Chair to sign it with the full support of all ExCom members.

8. AOB and Close

Selection process for the new HLSG chair

Denmark's ExCom representative:

- 8.1 requested a clear timeline detailing when the selection committee for the new HLSG Chair will be formed and the subsequent steps involved in the process, to ensure clarity and alignment on the timing.

In response, the ECW Deputy Director:

- 8.2 confirmed that communication has been made with the outgoing HLSG Chair and an update on the selection process for the new Chair will be shared with the ExCom later in the afternoon⁴.

⁴ **UPDATE:** A letter from the HLSG Chair Rt Hon Gordon Brown was shared with the HLSG on 26 November at 2:24 PM EST, inviting inputs from HLSG members on the selection process. Subsequently, a letter from the HLSG chair on the nomination and selection of the new HLSG chair was sent to the HLSG on 10 December at 10:46 AM EST.

ExCom Meetings in 2025

The ExCom Co-Chairs:

- 8.3 confirmed that the meeting schedule for 2025 has been finalized, with the decision to pilot a reduced number of three meetings instead of four and ease the workload on the ECW Secretariat. This approach was agreed upon earlier and has been welcomed by the Secretariat;
- 8.4 shared the following meeting dates:
- a. 25 March 2025 (Virtual meeting)
 - b. 18 November 2025 (Virtual meeting)
 - c. An in-person meeting will be held in between, though the specific location is yet to be determined.
- 8.5 noted earlier discussions about aligning the in-person meeting with GPE meetings for convenience, but logistical challenges have made this arrangement difficult to implement. Invited the Deputy Director to share further updates on the in-person meeting.

The ECW Deputy Director:

- 8.6 shared a tentative proposal for the in-person ExCom meeting to be held on 11 June 2025, with a possible half-day follow-up session. This schedule aims to balance travel commitments for members attending the GPE Board meeting;
- 8.7 acknowledged challenges in hosting the meeting in a programme partner country, citing logistical difficulties and alignment with GPE's planned location in Tajikistan, which is not an ECW focus country.
- 8.8 proposed Geneva as a likely alternative, noting its central location for participants traveling from Tajikistan and North America, its hosting of the EIE Hub, and strong support from the Swiss government. While this does not meet the preference for a programme country, Geneva offers practical and logistical advantages, and the proposal is open for further discussion.

In discussion, the ExCom:

- 8.9 noted the concerns raised by the Youth and Student-led Representative about the decision to hold only one in-person ExCom meeting annually, emphasizing the challenges this poses for civil society and constituency representatives, particularly new members, in building relationships, understanding discussions, and actively participating;
- 8.10 noted the Representative's request for clarity on the process for reviewing and revising this decision, highlighting the importance of ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all representatives in the governance process.

In response, the Co-chairs:

- 8.11 suggested revisiting the decision on the meeting format next year after the pilot concludes, proposing a review in November 2025 to assess the effectiveness of having three meetings—two virtual and one in-person.

Other matters

The Co-Chair from Norway requested that as the Executive Director's term may expire in the years ahead, there is perhaps work to be done in 2025 to identify a successor. In response to the Co-Chair's comment, the ECW Deputy Director:

- 8.12 clarified that no process has been initiated nor is planned for recruiting a new Executive Director, emphasizing that the incumbent's contractual situation is governed by UNICEF rules and procedures, including renewals and rotations;
- 8.13 highlighted that discussions in the Operational Manual regarding the Executive Director are forward-looking and pertain to the next Executive Director, not the current incumbent; and reiterated that no recruitment process is in the pipeline.

In closing, the ECW Executive Director:

- 8.14 acknowledged the departure of Gordon Brown as HLSC Chair, with regret yet with confidence in the future leadership transition; and encouraged the ExCom to remain focused on advancing the Operational Manual and other critical processes, delegating leadership transitions and the hosting review to the appropriate teams without unnecessary interference;
- 8.15 stressed the need to refocus on children's needs in the field beyond addressing bureaucratic tasks, urging the ExCom to prioritize resource mobilization and in-country initiatives;
- 8.16 thanked the ExCom for their dedication, professionalism, and contributions to ECW's success, highlighting the importance of positive collaboration, transparency, and a shared mission to maintain strong donor relationships.

ExCom Co-Chairs:

- 8.17 reiterated that the HLSC Chair's term is governed by established rules, allowing for two terms of three years plus a one-year extension; and acknowledged that Gordon Brown has exceeded this period at the request of ECW to ensure continuity until a successor is appointed, reflecting adherence to governance principles;
- 8.18 adjourned the meeting, expressing appreciation on the productive discussions and important decisions made during the meeting, and emphasizing the importance of maintaining a positive and collaborative spirit in ExCom meetings.

Annexes

Annex A: [List of Participants](#)

Annex B: [Agenda](#)

Annex C: [Executive Director's Update Presentation](#)

Annex D: [2025 Annual Work Plan Presentation](#)

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