

MINUTES

Executive Committee Meeting

Tue 25 March 2025, Virtual

1. Welcome and introduction

- 1.1 The Executive Committee (ExCom) Co-Chair welcomed all participants and extended a special welcome to ExCom members attending the meeting for the first time. She introduced Haya Abdulrahman Al-Thani, Strategic Partnerships Department Manager, attending on behalf of the Qatar Fund for Development, and Faiza Hassan, the new Director of INEE.
- 1.2 The Co-Chair acknowledged the very challenging times the world is facing, with many conflicts, increasing numbers of refugees, and diminishing resources. She noted that while these realities are difficult, ECW represents a unique and coordinated community that does not need convincing about the importance of education in emergencies. She expressed hope that, through the meeting, cooperation and support for education in emergencies—already strong—would become even stronger.
- 1.3 The Co-chair pointed out that the agenda had been modified in that no decision would be sought under item 3. The modified agenda was adopted without objections, with members encouraged to raise any items for discussion under Any Other Business (AOB) later in the meeting.

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

2. ECW Director's Update

- 2.1 The ECW Director presented a comprehensive update on the current operational and financial situation facing ECW. She noted that two external developments have significantly impacted ECW's budget for 2023–2026.
 - a. First, a stop-work order from the United States may result in a funding loss of approximately US\$ 83 million, although no official termination letter had been received by ECW at the time of the meeting.
 - b. Second, the absence of a signed Hosting Arrangement with UNICEF was flagged as a critical risk. Without such an arrangement in place by 31 March 2025, ECW will no longer be authorized to receive new contributions.
- 2.2 The Director noted that several pledges, including contributions from Qatar and France, remain pending due to the partners internal processes and will have to await the signing of the Hosting Arrangement. In total, approximately US\$ 147 million is affected.
- 2.3 ECW has aligned its internal operations with UNICEF's austerity measures and is undertaking internal reviews to reduce operational expenditures. This includes reducing travel and consulting costs.

- 2.4 Despite the reduced funding outlook, ECW will prioritize retaining the agreed balances between the funding windows in 2025. The main effect of this is that fewer MYRPs are likely to be renewed in 2025 to ensure a balanced financial framework. ExCom will be consulted on the process of focusing the MYRP portfolio and implications for MYRP renewals.
- 2.5 The Acceleration Facility will be strategically used to inspire political commitment, evidence-based messaging and advocacy with an investment approach focused on leveraging new funding rather than service delivery.
- 2.6 The Director urged all members to advocate strongly for education in emergencies as an investment in peace, dignity, and long-term development. She emphasized that decisions on hosting and financing must prioritize ECW's ability to deliver.

3. Resource Mobilization

- 3.1 The Secretariat presented a resource mobilization strategy proposing a four-year cycle (2026–2030), with a fundraising target of US\$ 600 million. This reduction from the current strategic cycle reflects ECW response and alignment to today's fiscal realities while preserving ECW's core programmatic impact amid declining global Official Development Assistance (ODA).
- 3.2 It was noted that this new target for the period 2027-2030 presents a 30-40% reduction in delivery volumes compared to current levels.
- 3.3 The Secretariat proposed a date for the replenishment moment towards the end of 2026. This timeline for replenishment avoids overlap with the GPE replenishment in early 2026 and offers yet another moment for advocacy for Education in 2026.
- 3.4 ECW's campaign will be launched in September 2025 to allow ample time for resource mobilization throughout 2026. ECW will agree with CSO and other advocacy partners on the campaign timeline and when to intensify public outreach.
- 3.5 The Secretariat indicated that further analysis would be conducted on how ECW's programming could adapt to the new financial envelope. This includes defining priority countries and funds to be dedicated for emergency response and for multi-year programs. The case for investment will be produced in draft form for review ahead of June ExCom meeting in 2025.
- 3.6 Members welcomed the early planning and praised the Secretariat for its realistic and adaptive approach. There was a strong call to test funding assumptions with donors, including traditional and emerging contributors, before launching the campaign.
- 3.7 Members emphasized the need to remain flexible and tolerant of ambiguity, recognizing that political and financial landscapes could shift rapidly. Members encouraged ECW to retain its ability to pivot strategically and respond to new opportunities and constraints.
- 3.8 There was broad agreement on the importance of reinforcing complementarity and avoiding duplication with other actors, notably GPE, UNICEF, and civil society partners. Members emphasized the need for coherence across education in development and humanitarian contexts.

- 3.9** The voice of children and youth was elevated as a key advocacy message, with several members recalling that communities consistently express a desire for continued access to education, even amidst emergencies. It was agreed that the replenishment case should reflect this demand clearly and powerfully.
- 3.10** Members supported deeper engagement with humanitarian partners and emphasized the need for education to be protected in humanitarian response plans. It was noted that ECW has requested a meeting with UN OCHA's leadership to strengthen coordination and reinforce education's inclusion in humanitarian prioritization frameworks.
- 3.11** The Secretariat reaffirmed its commitment to innovative finance mechanisms—such as blended finance, outcome-based investments, Public Private Partnerships, and debt swaps—as means to augment core funding. Engagements with partners in Norway, the UK, LEGO Foundation, and Switzerland were highlighted as early examples of progress in this area.
- 3.12** The discussion highlighted the importance of cross-sectoral funding approaches, particularly partnerships with the health, nutrition, social protection, and economic sectors. Members emphasized that integrating education with broader humanitarian and development goals—such as livelihoods and economic empowerment for vulnerable communities—could unlock new funding opportunities and expand ECW's reach.
- 3.13** Civil society organizations reaffirmed their commitment to mobilizing support behind ECW's campaign and called for the effort to be framed as part of a wider movement to protect and expand education in emergencies, not only as a replenishment event.
- 3.14** The Secretariat committed to consulting broadly with members and partners on the case for investment, including identifying champions and aligning with national and global moments in 2025–2026. A draft is expected to be shared in mid-2025, with campaign outreach ramping up in the second half of the year.

4. Financial Framework

- 4.1** The Secretariat presented a revised financial envelope for the 2023–2026 strategic period, totaling US\$ 796 million. This figure reflects adjustments based on actual contributions received, signed donor agreements, and a planned reserve to allow operations to begin in 2027 before replenishment funds are secured.
- 4.2** The 2025 programmatic budget was revised downward from US\$ 235.6 million to US\$ 194.5 million. The operational budget for the same year was reduced from US\$ 16.3 million to US\$ 13.5 million, with a target of further reducing operational expenditure to US\$ 10.5 million in 2026.
- 4.3** The Secretariat committed to remaining within a 7% ceiling for operational costs over the strategic period. Cost reduction measures include staff position freezes, postponement of recruitments, delayed consultancies, reduced travel, and leaner mission composition.
- 4.4** The Secretariat provided an overview of the current MYRP portfolio. Twenty-eight MYRPs are active, with ten up for renewal in 2025. Several countries, including Somalia, DRC, Sudan, and Nigeria, are in the pipeline for future programming, pending available resources.

Four countries have requested no-cost extensions, buying time for strategic planning and potential renewal.

- 4.5 Members broadly welcomed the financial prudence reflected in the Secretariat's revised projections. They expressed appreciation for efforts to remain within the 7% operational cost ceiling while preserving programmatic delivery capacity.
- 4.6 Members stressed that financial constraints must not come at the cost of programme quality. They urged ECW to maintain its focus on delivering results and protecting the core standards and principles that define the Fund's added value in crisis contexts.
- 4.7 Members emphasized the importance of using clear, transparent, and equity-focused criteria when determining how to prioritize reduced allocations across countries and programmes. There was strong interest in understanding how decisions would reflect levels of need, vulnerability, and contextual risk.
- 4.8 It was further noted that even in a resource-constrained environment, ECW should ensure dedicated space and support for youth engagement, particularly within its governance, programming, and replenishment efforts.
- 4.9 Members highlighted that the resource strain is being felt across ECW's delivery ecosystem, including UN partners, civil society consortia, and national actors. Several participants noted that reduced funding to education in emergencies could have severe implications for the sustainability of field-based implementation capacity.
- 4.10 In light of the scale-down of MYRPs, members called for a responsible exit strategy in contexts where ECW support is ending or being reduced. They emphasized the importance of coordinating closely with national governments, local partners, and donors to ensure continuity of essential education services and avoid abrupt funding gaps.
- 4.11 Members further encouraged the Secretariat to apply a "do no harm" approach in its resource allocation and transition planning. This includes mitigating risks of leaving vulnerable children without access to education or disrupting gains made in fragile settings where ECW investments have built community trust.
- 4.12 The Secretariat committed to preparing a comprehensive portfolio management approach to guide decisions on MYRP renewals and new investments. This package, which will include strategic criteria, country prioritization methodology, and transition guidance, will be shared for consultation with the Technical Advisory Group and presented to the ExCom for decision in June 2025.
- 4.13 Members encouraged continued transparency and dialogue with the ExCom on how these financial constraints would be managed, including scenario planning and alignment with ECW's next strategic plan.

Decisions (per official record)

- The ExCom approved the reduction of the 2025 programmatic portfolio, from US\$ 235.6M to US\$ 194.5M;

- The ExCom approved the revision of the 2025 operational budget from US\$ 16.3M to US\$ 13.5M.
- The ECW Secretariat will develop and present different options for adapting its portfolio to the changed financial framework, and present these options for approval as soon as possible in an extraordinary ExCom meeting;
- The ECW Secretariat will comply with the 7% threshold for the 2023–2026 Strategic Period.

5. Operational Manual

- 5.1** The Chair of the Operational Manual Advisory Group (OMAG) presented a comprehensive overview of the updated Operational Manual, the outcome of an extensive 15-month process. This revision involved iterative consultations, legal reviews, and in-person advisory group meetings, resulting in a streamlined and updated governance document intended to improve efficiency, accountability, and inclusivity within ECW's governance.
- 5.2** The updated Manual aims to clarify the division of labour and respective roles and responsibilities of the ExCom and the High-Level Steering Group (HLSG), in alignment with ECW's strategic and operational evolution. It rebalances governance by delegating decision-making authority to the ExCom, while the HLSG retains oversight on high-level policy direction, senior leadership appointments, and broader strategic coherence.
- 5.3** A key update included in the Manual is the formal establishment of a Technical Advisory Group (TAG). This mechanism is intended to provide structured and timely technical input into ExCom discussions. The TAG will include sub-groups focusing on thematic priorities such as gender, disability inclusion, and displacement, ensuring more robust and diversified technical engagement in governance processes.
- 5.4** The updated Manual also introduces provisions that recognizing existing constituencies and committing to national civil society organizations and youth and student-led subgroups. The Manual's language ensures adequate and sustainable financial support for their effective and continuous participation in ECW governance and wider EiE policy and advocacy spaces. This reflects a broader commitment to equitable representation and meaningful inclusion of traditionally underrepresented actors.
- 5.5** Members welcomed the attention given to equitable and meaningful representation, noting that the language in the Manual signals an important shift toward more inclusive and participatory governance. There was broad agreement that support to national civil society organizations and the youth- and student-led subgroups must be both financial and substantive, ensuring that these groups are able to engage meaningfully in ECW's decision-making processes and other relevant EiE spaces.
- 5.6** The importance of continued reflection on ExCom's composition was emphasized by members. The inclusion of multilateral agencies, philanthropic organizations, and global networks under a more structured constituency model was proposed as an area for further exploration. Members expressed interest in discussing whether such a model could be piloted during the next strategic period.

- 5.7** It was noted that the revised Operational Manual had been reviewed and deemed fully consistent with UNICEF’s hosting procedures and the current draft of the new Hosting Arrangement. Should there be any subsequent edits to the Hosting Arrangement before signature, the Operational Manual will be updated accordingly to ensure alignment.
- 5.8** Members noted that the only change on the time length of the ECW Director's post is as follows: “The term of the ECW Director may be time-limited, as decided by UNICEF’s Deputy Executive Director – Programmes at the time of recruitment or renewal of appointment, following consultation with the HLSG, which will seek the views of the ExCom.”
- 5.9** The Chair of OMAG confirmed that the final version of the Operational Manual would be circulated immediately following the meeting for written approval via a five-day non-objection process, concluding on 31 March 2025 (New York time). The final approved version would then be submitted to the HLSG for formal endorsement.
- 5.10** Members encouraged the Secretariat to continue consultations regarding future revisions to the ExCom composition. It was agreed that the June 2025 ExCom meeting would include a dedicated agenda item to explore whether a pilot constituency model could be tested for some stakeholder groups.
- 5.11** Members welcomed the proposal for a light-touch review of the Operational Manual after 12 months to assess whether the new provisions are functioning as intended and to allow for further adjustments, including to ExCom composition and constituency engagement models.

Decisions (per official record):

- The ExCom noted the comprehensive and inclusive approach which has been taken in developing the updated version of the Operational Manual;
- The ExCom noted that the updated version of the Operational Manual is consistent with the language in the draft Hosting Arrangement and UNICEF's Procedures for Hosted Funds and Partnerships. Should there be any edits to the Hosting Arrangement once it is finalized, any associated changes will also be made to the Operational Manual text;
- The ExCom welcomed the OMAG Chair’s swift written consultation on the final Operational Manual text, with a deadline for approval via non-objection of COB 31 March 2025 (New York time) and a view to submitting it to the HLSG for approval;
- The ExCom agreed to continue discussion on ExCom composition at ExCom meeting in June by exploring with multilateral and international network colleagues how a new constituency model could work and if this could be trialed;
- The ExCom agreed to conduct light touch review after 12 months from approval of updated OM to see if new provisions are working and make necessary adaptation (e.g. in ExCom composition);
- The ExCom agreed to share recommendations of OMAG on HLSG membership and focus of HLSG discussions with HLSG Chair.

6. Election of ExCom Chair and Vice Chair

- 6.1** The Co-Chair opened the item by noting that Norway will step down from the Chair role at the June 2025 ExCom meeting, concluding a two-year period of co-chairing alongside Germany.
- 6.2** The Secretariat had issued a call for expressions of interest in February 2025 for the incoming Chair and Vice-Chair or Co-Chair roles.
- 6.3** Following the conclusion of the expression of interest period, some members had manifested availability, and Switzerland came forward as the sole candidate, expressing interest in assuming one of the two leadership roles in partnership with Germany, who indicated its intention to remain in a leadership position for an additional year.
- 6.4** The Co-Chair voiced appreciation to Switzerland for the candidacy, and to those who had expressed interest in taking on governance responsibilities. The Co-Chair explained that, based on this outcome, the leadership transition would not require the formation of a selection committee or formal vote. Instead, Germany and Switzerland will engage in internal consultations to determine whether they will adopt a Co-Chair model or a Chair/Vice-Chair arrangement.
- 6.5** Members were informed that a formal proposal on the leadership model and nominations for the Chair and Vice-Chair (or Co-Chairs) will be presented for ExCom endorsement at the June 2025 meeting.
- 6.6** Germany shared that the experience of co-chairing had been positive and noted that succession models — including transitions from Vice-Chair to Chair — had worked well in past leadership rotations. The approach is still under discussion and will aim to ensure continuity and equity in representation.
- 6.7** Switzerland confirmed its interest in serving in a leadership capacity and expressed its appreciation to Germany for its willingness to continue for one more year. It was noted that the final roles (Chair or Vice-Chair) were still under discussion and that Switzerland's designated representative for the role would be Dominik Stillhart, SDC's Deputy Director General and Head of Humanitarian Aid.
- 6.8** Members welcomed the clarity of the process and the collaborative spirit of the incoming leadership. Appreciation was extended to Norway for its steadfast and effective chairing during a period marked by strategic shifts and institutional reform.

7. Hosting Review and Hosting Arrangement

- 7.1** The Secretariat provided an update on the Hosting Review, in reference to the HLSG discussion in September 2024. Building on the work carried out in 2018, the review is intended to map out the different hosting options currently available to ECW, both inside and outside the UN system. To this end, ECW is proposing a two-phased approach, with an initial phase to compile a list of potential hosts and to develop and build consensus around criteria against which they will be assessed. Then, following ExCom approval, there will be a second phase to liaise with shortlisted potential hosts to obtain authoritative information about their respective offers, and to weigh the pros and cons of each of these offers through a

comparative assessment. ExCom was invited to provide feedback on the draft Terms of Reference by 27 March 2025.

- 7.2** The Secretariat responded to inquiries on the status of the new Hosting Arrangement between ECW and UNICEF. The current transitional extension expires on 31 March 2025.
- 7.3** The Secretariat shared that approximately US\$147 million in pledges from donors such as the US, France, and Qatar have been excluded from the revised ECW 2023–2026 Financial Framework, as they are unlikely to materialize within the Strategic Period.
- 7.4** The Secretariat emphasized that while the Hosting Arrangement is a critical administrative requirement, it does not entail any irrevocable or long-term obligations for ECW or UNICEF. Should the governance structure evolve in future, the Arrangement can be modified or terminated in accordance with sections 7.2 – 7.9 of the Hosting Arrangement.
- 7.5** Members acknowledged the urgency of the situation and expressed support for finalizing the Hosting Arrangement without delay. UNICEF provided detailed clarifications in response to questions about the scope of contributions affected by the 31 March deadline, emphasizing the following key points:
- a.** After 31 March 2025, UNICEF will no longer be able to accept any new contributions from current or new donors unless the revised Hosting Arrangement is signed. Current scheduled payments from existing donors can continue as planned.
 - b.** Norway reported from the trilateral meeting between the German Co-Chair, the representative of Norway and UNICEF’s chief legal counsel. Norway explained the confirmation of the legal counsel, that donors can still make planned contributions under current SCAs. UNICEF confirmed that the current SCA allows existing donors to continue to make scheduled payments to ECW. New and additional contributions, from current or new donors, cannot be accepted until the new Hosting Arrangement is finalized. The distinction is not between new and existing donors, but between new contributions of any kind.
- 7.6** UNICEF confirmed that the Hosting Arrangement is not to be negotiated but will review suggested amendments to the document that can be accommodated within the context of its Regulatory Framework.
- 7.7** Members welcomed the clarification and reaffirmed their support for immediate finalization of the Hosting Arrangement. They acknowledged the Secretariat’s efforts to ensure continuity and emphasized that while broader institutional questions can be pursued in parallel, the immediate priority is safeguarding ECW’s ability to receive funds.

8. Closing

- 8.1** The Chair thanked all participants for their active engagement, constructive inputs, and strong commitment to ECW’s mission in the face of an increasingly challenging global context.
- 8.2** Due to time constraints, the agenda items related to the HLSG meeting agenda for April and other items raised under AOB were not discussed during the session.

8.3 These outstanding items will be addressed in an extraordinary ExCom meeting to be convened in April 2025, with details to be communicated by the Secretariat in due course.

Annexes

Annex A: [List of Participants](#)

Annex B: [Agenda and Supporting Papers](#)

Annex C: [Recording and transcript](#) (available upon request)

Annex D: [Financial Framework Presentation](#)

Annex E: [Summary of Decisions](#)