



**United Nations**

# **Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund**

**Report on the first and second regular  
sessions and annual session of 2021**

**Economic and Social Council**

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*Note*

Symbols of United Nations documents are composed of letters combined with figures. Mention of such a symbol indicates a reference to a United Nations document.

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**Part one**  
**First regular session of 2021**

**Held at United Nations Headquarters from  
9 to 12 February 2021**



## **I. Organization of the session**

### **A. Adoption of the provisional annotated agenda, timetable and organization of work**

1. The Executive Board adopted the agenda, timetable and organization of work (E/ICEF/2021/1/Rev.2).
2. The Secretary of the Executive Board announced that 47 observer delegations, including 1 intergovernmental organization, 1 international organization, 9 non-governmental organizations and 8 National Committees for UNICEF had submitted credentials, in accordance with rule 50.2 of the rules of procedure.

### **B. Opening statements by the President of the Executive Board and the Executive Director of UNICEF**

3. The President welcomed all members and observers of the Executive Board to the first regular session of the Board and noted the new members of the Bureau. She acknowledged the UNICEF Executive Director and thanked UNICEF staff.
4. The President said that, at this time last year, everybody had high hopes for 2020. Today, however, instead of the accelerated progress for children that had been hoped for, the world was reckoning with the brutal impact of an unprecedented global pandemic. She said the most vulnerable had suffered the most.
5. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic had revealed and increased inequities globally, including highlighting gaps in education, social security, gender and digital access.
6. Despite these challenges, UNICEF had persisted. The President praised the quick and effective response by the organization, including leadership at headquarters and offices in the field. She noted the swift adaptation to the new realities by UNICEF personnel on the ground. She said that UNICEF had supported access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services and provided personal protective equipment in more than 100 countries. The organization had supported millions of children with remote and home-based learning and reached billions of people with science-based COVID-19-related messages.
7. UNICEF had also used innovative partnerships, such as an agreement with the largest soap manufacturer in Burundi, to produce extremely low-cost soap for use in that country.
8. UNICEF work to address the pandemic was coupled with its ongoing work, such as fighting malnutrition and supporting routine vaccination.
9. The President said UNICEF needed to commit to getting back on track to achieving the child-related Sustainable Development Goals, because the world's children could not wait for the end of the pandemic to see the progress.
10. With the accelerating development of vaccines, the world dared to imagine the pandemic's end. The President strongly appreciated and welcomed the efforts by UNICEF as part of the COVAX Facility to enable equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.
11. She noted that, as the largest single vaccine buyer in the world, UNICEF was contributing invaluable expertise in procurement, logistics, freight and storage, and the Board looked forward to welcoming representatives of the World Health Organization (WHO), a key partner of the COVAX initiative, during the agenda item on COVID-19.

12. The pandemic had highlighted the importance of quality health systems, which would be a topic of the presentation on country programme documents.
13. In the education realm, the President emphasized the importance of quality remote education and solutions aimed at providing children with digital learning opportunities by 2030 and the need for equal opportunities for learning, including inclusiveness for children with disabilities.
14. Wider use of new technologies was also important, as was scaling up innovations. This would also enable local communities and activists to contribute more for their development and well-being, and to a cleaner and safer environment.
15. The President called on Member States to help UNICEF to secure the flexible and sustainable resources it would need to fully implement its mandate.
16. The Board members should be encouraged by the determination of UNICEF to build back better. The pandemic had galvanized UNICEF to rethink the way it operated and to seize the disruptions and hurdles as opportunities for change and experimentation.
17. The President said the Executive Board would do everything it could to support UNICEF in the development of the next Strategic Plan.
18. The Executive Director said that the year 2021, which marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of UNICEF, would provide a milestone opportunity to highlight the organization's role in serving and supporting children and to continue adapting UNICEF for the future.
19. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the world had already been off track in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals, with children threatened by worsening humanitarian emergencies, continued violence, poverty, exclusion and discrimination, a changing climate, a denial of their rights to health and education and inequalities that limited their futures. In the pandemic, children were shouldering the brunt of lockdowns, experiencing restrictions to transportation and movement, interruptions in such vital services as immunizations and basic health care, rising food insecurity and school and playground closures.
20. The number of children needing UNICEF support was expected to multiply. Countries would require unprecedented levels of assistance to rebuild shattered systems and to support their populations. The pandemic could be the largest disruption to global progress for children in modern history, one that would cause pain in all countries. Amid that darkening picture, UNICEF was hard at work.
21. During the session, the Executive Board would be updated on UNICEF progress in responding to the needs of the pandemic, including its leadership role in the COVAX Facility and in purchasing, transporting and delivering vaccines. The Board would also discuss several new country programme documents, all aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) and the UNICEF commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
22. The Board would also be updated on the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, which would reflect the organization's short-term priorities, including distance learning to save futures, immunization to save lives, water to save communities and mental health to save families. The Plan would also include such medium-term priorities as primary health care at the community level and ready access to a suite of health services. UNICEF would adapt its child protection programming; expand work on social policy and protection; integrate gender commitments across its programming; advance programming around climate; continue with its commitment

to stay and deliver within humanitarian emergencies; and pursue transactional fundraising and two-way social media engagement.

23. Discussions would also focus on the Private Fundraising and Partnerships workplan and the innovative financing instruments under development. UNICEF counted on Member States to increase their regular resources support based on the commitments made in the funding compact. UNICEF would continue to match donor generosity with strong financial stewardship and transparency. For the eighth consecutive year, UNICEF had received an unqualified audit opinion on its financial statements and would continue to monitor its financial estimates.

24. UNICEF continued to scale up bold innovations, improve its human resources system, implement organizational improvements and streamlining, and continue its journey to become more diverse and inclusive. In its seventy-fifth year, UNICEF would not stand still. It would continue to adapt and change to meet the needs of children.

25. The President opened the floor to general statements.

26. The context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on children, along with the need for equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, were dominant themes mentioned by nearly every delegation or group of delegations in their general statements. One delegation referred to the economic and social fallout of the pandemic as the long tail of COVID-19, while also noting that the moment nevertheless brought opportunities to demonstrate innovation and improve cooperation to deliver for children.

27. A delegation said that the COVID-19 pandemic had not only undermined initiatives to protect children but had further worsened the living conditions of children throughout the world. The pandemic had unravelled decades of health, education and other advances for children across the globe, in the view of another delegation. Another noted that the pandemic had made children, especially girls, more vulnerable to crimes of exploitation, such as domestic violence and trafficking and called on UNICEF to focus on these issues in the new Strategic Plan. One delegation said the concept of human security was a useful one in the current environment and should guide efforts to build back better in the post-COVID-19 era.

28. Two delegations said that the COVID-19 pandemic was pushing more children into extreme poverty or multidimensional poverty, with one of these saying that Member States and development partners needed to therefore raise their voices and speak for children. Five additional delegations and a group of delegations noted the challenges and vulnerabilities of children living in poverty or in poor households and the need to reduce multidimensional poverty.

29. One delegation hoped that in combating the pandemic, UNICEF would strengthen its coordination with other United Nations agencies to help countries and regions to alleviate the negative impact of the pandemic on children, women and other vulnerable groups. Another delegation remarked that the tireless efforts and commitment of the UNICEF Executive Director and staff had proved to be the cornerstone of assistance to children worldwide.

30. A delegation said that there was a need to create an enabling environment for health security across broader sectors, including water and sanitation, food and nutrition, education, gender and others to address the crisis beyond the immediate response. One delegation said that the moment called for the acceleration of efforts to tackle the profound challenge that all Member States were facing and guarantee that children's rights were promoted and protected.

31. The UNICEF leadership role in the COVAX Facility and in vaccine distribution was hailed by 14 delegations and by a group of delegations. One delegation considered the UNICEF involvement in the COVAX Facility to be a welcome development against vaccine nationalism and urged UNICEF to support technology transfer to developing countries and flexibility under intellectual property rights to ensure that vaccines reached the most vulnerable people. Several other delegations also noted the importance of the UNICEF role in fair vaccine access.

32. One delegation asked how UNICEF would be involved in the COVAX initiative and what would be done to ensure that middle-income countries could also have access to the vaccine, while a group of delegations said that the delivery of vaccines to low- and middle-income countries was not only a moral imperative, but enlightened self-interest. A delegation asked how UNICEF was planning to contribute to overcoming challenges in vaccine equity, especially in countries affected by conflict.

33. Another delegation said it hoped that UNICEF could benefit from all the contributions made to the COVAX Facility. Representatives of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch both called for equity in access to and the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine, with the former expressing concern that the COVAX Facility was operating subject to vaccine orders that rich countries had already secured.

34. Eight delegations talked of school closures and the learning crisis or called for the safe reopening of schools. One delegation was concerned that many children were falling behind in their education, with many at risk of dropping out, particularly girls and adolescents. Another delegation urged UNICEF and Member States to make education a priority for the new Strategic Plan, and to support countries to build resilient education systems and bridge the digital divide.

35. Several delegations cited the need to close the digital gap and eliminate digital exclusion, with delegations calling for more attention to the protection of children in the digital space, including in education, and noting that the pandemic had exacerbated the negative consequences of globalization and digitization. A delegation said that such partnership initiatives as Generation Unlimited and Giga, a UNICEF effort to connect schools to the Internet and children to information, were crucial to increasing investment in digital learning, building skills and youth empowerment, especially in the context of the digital transition and in the effort to leave no one behind. One delegation wanted more information on how UNICEF planned to expand its work on the safe reopening of schools.

36. Several delegations said that one consequence of the pandemic was the staggering emergence of violence against children (especially girls) as well as domestic violence, which children were forced to witness while confined to their homes. One delegation called for campaigns against domestic violence.

37. Noting the alarming psychological impact of the pandemic, a delegation mentioned the closure of schools; adjusting to virtual learning technologies; a lack of access to basic health care and outdoor activities; and domestic violence and sexual exploitation. Two delegations welcomed UNICEF support to making mental-health services or psychosocial support available for every child during this unprecedented disruption of their lives, and one noted that this was especially important in humanitarian situations and for children with disabilities.

38. One delegation felt that, considering the context of the pandemic and what needed to be accomplished in the next four-year cycle, the next Strategic Plan would be the most ambitious plan that UNICEF had ever undertaken. A delegation hoped that UNICEF would align the Strategic Plan with its mandate and the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for the development of the

United Nations system (QCPR), while another delegation asked how UNICEF was implementing the mandates of the QCPR resolution adopted the previous year.

39. A delegation welcomed hearing more about the lessons learned and best practices so far in terms of the four UNICEF priorities during the pandemic, particularly in implementing the United Nations development system reform and strengthening the connection between humanitarian and development efforts. The delegation asked how such lessons learned would inform the next Strategic Plan and programming for building back better.

40. A delegation said that UNICEF needed to innovate and adjust to new challenges and strengthen partnerships for implementation at the national, regional and global levels. Another delegation said that the new Plan should be built on the organization's comparative advantages, while two said that the Plan should be based on the principles of national ownership.

41. A delegation called for efforts to address climate change to be integrated into the new Strategic Plan, while a group of delegations said that climate awareness and action should be integrated into UNICEF programming, including its education initiatives.

42. Two delegations and a group of delegations called for more flexible funding for UNICEF, particularly in the context of pandemic recovery.

43. Two delegations spoke of the positive and transformative power of early childhood development work, with one delegation calling for a focus on the design of modern and efficient education systems to be developed in the new Strategic Plan.

44. Five delegations and two groups of delegations noted the seventy-fifth anniversary of UNICEF, with a group of delegations saying that it provided an opportunity for UNICEF to assess its policies and programmes for children and adolescents. A delegation said that the future of UNICEF lay in preserving the trust that Member States placed in it and in continuing to live up to that trust, as it always had.

### **C. Election of officers of the Executive Board**

45. The Executive Board elected as President the Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations, Audra Plepytė, and as Vice-Presidents: the Permanent Representatives to the United Nations of Morocco, Omar Hilale; New Zealand, Craig J. Hawke; and Costa Rica, Rodrigo A. Carazo; and the Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations of the Republic of Korea, Hyunjoo Oh.

## **II. Deliberations of the Executive Board**

### **A. Updated road map to the development of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, including consultations and briefings**

46. The item was introduced by the Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, and presented by the Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring.

47. A group of delegations noted the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for children and for the ways in which UNICEF would respond to their needs over the coming years. A delegation praised UNICEF for working towards a Plan that accounted for the effects of the pandemic, integrated the United Nations reform and ensured harmonization with other United Nations agencies. The delegation wanted to see how UNICEF would conceptually address humanitarian action in development

work. Another delegation and a group of delegations welcomed steps to better link such work; the delegation noted the importance of safeguarding principled humanitarian action. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, said that the new Strategic Plan would strengthen the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

48. The group of delegations welcomed the Plan's ambition regarding gender and hoped that a focus on structural barriers, harmful practices and transformative actions would be at the core of the Plan. A delegation called for strategic approaches to address equality and coverage. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, said that the Plan would strengthen the use of social-behavioural science as part of its approach to addressing the structural barriers linked to gender inequality.

49. The group of delegations said the pandemic had demonstrated an urgent need for flexible and predictable funding to quickly adapt and respond.

50. The group and another delegation welcomed the stronger focus on outcome-level results, while the group requested that outcomes have a clear thematic orientation, which would incentivize the soft earmarking of funds. The delegation emphasized the need for a clear line of accountability between country-office action and aggregated results and the need for generating outcome-oriented evidence. While acknowledging that flexibility on output-level results was needed, the group of delegations hoped that the Plan's results framework would still reflect the unique contribution of UNICEF to results in countries. The group and another delegation also called for improved performance reporting.

51. A delegation looked forward to a Plan that reflected the importance of the UNICEF normative mandate; it encouraged further work on multisectoral approaches, especially the human rights-based approach, the principle of leaving no one behind and the conflict-sensitive approach. The Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, said that UNICEF took to heart these principles. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes said the forthcoming Plan would have this multisectoral approach and would reflect related lessons learned during the pandemic.

52. The delegation asked how UNICEF would align these approaches with the Plans of other agencies and implement them in countries. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, responded that UNICEF was working with other agencies on what each would contribute, with the aim of ensuring complementarity as well as accountability. Several delegations appreciated the joint Strategic Plan consultations held with other New York-based funds and programmes.

53. A delegation wanted UNICEF to put sustainability at the core of its work by applying a climate and environmental lens to its programming. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, responded that a focus on sustainability, along with resilience and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, would be strengthened in the new Plan. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, said UNICEF had made progress on ecoefficiency, including on an inter-agency basis. UNICEF had hundreds of "green teams" around the world. The next Strategic Plan would align UNICEF emission reduction targets with those of the United Nations.

## **B. UNICEF programme cooperation**

### **(a) Country programme documents**

54. The country programme documents (CPDs) for Azerbaijan, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Georgia, North Macedonia, Panama, Somalia, Tunisia, Uruguay and Uzbekistan were considered by the Board. Following an introduction by the Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, the Director, Health Section, Programme

Division, gave a presentation, followed by a short video on the 11 countries and by remarks from four guest panellists.

55. In a pre-recorded message, the Minister of Health, North Macedonia, reiterated his Government's commitment to providing quality health care while safeguarding gains, building resilience and including a focus on mental health and children with disabilities. He underscored the role of UNICEF in supporting these efforts.

56. Joining via pre-recorded video, the Minister of Planning and Development, Côte d'Ivoire, highlighted the country's progress and challenges relating to health indicators. She noted the importance of multisectoral approaches, innovations and complementary strategies for behaviour change, as well as engagement strategies that included participation by adolescents, especially young girls.

57. A young Girl Scout leader from Tunisia spoke of her organization's extensive efforts to reach and support communities to address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, including through communication campaigns on handwashing and awareness-raising, promoting the active participation of young people.

58. In his pre-recorded remarks, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator for Somalia underscored the alignment of the CPD with the UNSDCF and National Development Plan. The CPD would facilitate adaptive programming and bolster joint programming with the United Nations agencies to build resilience and ensure sustainability.

59. After the panellists, Member States had the floor for their comments. The representative of China stressed the need for stronger and more resilient public health systems, expressed appreciation for the longstanding cooperation with UNICEF, and affirmed that the CPD incorporated inputs from stakeholders, was fully aligned with the UNSDCF, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, national priorities and the UNICEF mandate.

60. The representative of Tunisia expressed appreciation for the participation by the Girl Scout. The new country programme would prioritize inclusive socioeconomic development; education; health; water, sanitation and hygiene; the environment; and access to justice, with a continued focus on equity, inclusion, gender and adolescent participation.

61. The representative of Georgia highlighted achievements made with UNICEF support, including strengthening the human rights machinery, reducing maternal and child mortality and strengthening social protection, health care and education systems.

62. The representative of Somalia thanked UNICEF for its continued support to the health infrastructure and expressed appreciation for the emphasis in the CPD on child mortality and maternal health.

63. The representative of Uzbekistan expressed appreciation for UNICEF collaboration in helping to repatriate women and children from conflict zones, protecting children's rights, conducting childcare reform and strengthening the education system.

64. The representative of Uruguay highlighted the importance of education, and stressed its continuity, including through technological platforms; reopening schools safely; and continued work with UNICEF within the framework of the new CPD.

65. The representative of Panama welcomed the CPD and reported significant challenges and inequality gaps despite the country's high-income status. She underscored the country's improved data collection and disaggregation and fostering

of resilience, as well as the Government's commitment to work with UNICEF and partners in responding to children's needs.

66. The representative of Eswatini reported reduced foreign development assistance due to its classification as a lower-middle-income country, which did not reflect the on-the-ground situation. She appreciated UNICEF assistance in scaling up resource mobilization efforts and providing technical and financial support within the United Nations system response plan.

67. The representative of Azerbaijan said that UNICEF had been a crucial partner in health care, education, social services and child protection, including for children affected by war and those with disabilities. The delegation from Azerbaijan added that it rejected an attempt by a delegation to politicize the meeting.

68. The representative of North Macedonia valued the longstanding cooperation with UNICEF and underscored the Government's priorities of protecting children without parental care, improving education quality, eradicating child poverty and preventing violence against children.

69. The representative of Côte d'Ivoire commended the cooperation with UNICEF and the United Nations and reiterated her Government's commitment to work with UNICEF and partners to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union Agenda.

70. A delegation emphasized that CPDs were agency-specific, country-level tools that should clearly define the organization's support for addressing a programme country's most pressing domestic development needs in a targeted and impartial way. While regional and international cooperation in CPDs could help build capacity in support of country-level development goals, regional and international cooperation references within the CPDs should not imply endorsement or support and should not, in and of themselves, be CPD goals. The delegation added that CPDs were not the appropriate instrument to advance agencies' own global programmatic and fundraising objectives or to promote the foreign-policy platforms and global development goals of programme countries.

71. A delegation expressed appreciation for the cooperation with UNICEF and efforts to alleviate the impact of COVID-19, stressed the importance of ensuring that programmes aligned with national needs and priorities and noted its concern about what it considered to be political language in a CPD.

72. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/1 on a no-objection basis (see annex I).

**(b) Extensions of ongoing country programmes**

73. The President stated that, in accordance with its decision 2009/11, the Executive Board had been informed of the four-month extension of the country programmes for Armenia and Malaysia, following a two-month extension; and the first one-year extensions of the country programmes for Croatia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mongolia and the United Republic of Tanzania.

74. The Executive Board was requested to approve the four-month extension of the country programme for the Syrian Arab Republic, following two consecutive one-year extensions, a nine-month extension, a three-month extension and a two-month extension; and the one-year extension of the country programme for Tajikistan, following a one-year extension.

75. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/2 (see annex I).



### **C. Oral report on UNICEF follow-up to the recommendations and decisions of the forty-fifth and forty-sixth Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS Programme Coordinating Board meetings**

76. The Associate Director and Chief of the HIV/AIDS Section, Programme Division, presented the oral report.

77. A group of delegations noted its deep concern that the world had fallen short of the global targets for 2020, that progress towards ending AIDS in children had stalled since 2015 and that the COVID-19 pandemic had worsened the situation. The group said that the main hindrances were a worrying level of service gaps, including uneven prevention and treatment coverage, with systems failing to reach all pregnant mothers with HIV and many women struggling to remain on antiretroviral therapy. The group also cited social and structural barriers that severely undermined progress.

78. The group expressed support for UNICEF plans to address these issues by focusing on integration as a key pillar of the HIV strategic plan; ensuring that all women and adolescent girls had access to sexual and reproductive health services and that all young people received comprehensive sexuality education; ensuring more political will and investment of sufficient financial resources in health-care systems and their appropriate allocation; ensuring coherence between the UNICEF Strategic Plan and the Global AIDS Strategy with regard to HIV programming; and providing sufficient resources to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Unified Budget Results and Accountability Framework.

79. A delegation urged accelerated efforts to avoid the reversal of gains and to offset the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HIV/AIDS programming. The delegation regretted that none of the super-fast-track targets for children and adolescents for 2018 and 2020 had been met and expressed concern about donor fatigue and diminishing political will. The delegation asked what concrete steps UNICEF was taking to prevent further erosion of progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS amid the pandemic.

80. A delegation said that it was encouraged by the inclusion of UNICEF in the next UNAIDS strategy and by the organization's continued work on community systems to improve responses on HIV and children. The delegation appreciated the organization's differentiated programming focused on the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV through global fund proposals and improved programme quality and efficiency; and commended work by UNICEF to reduce stigma and its impact on adolescents. The delegation strongly concurred with the approach outlined in the background note, namely more focus on the HIV/AIDS response among children and adolescents, particularly adolescent girls.

81. A delegation requested that the secretariat avoid using the term "sexual and reproductive health and rights", which had been included in the report, stating that this language had not been included in the previous UNICEF Strategic Plan and was not an internationally agreed term.

82. The representative of UNAIDS thanked UNICEF for its contributions as a key member of the joint programme and welcomed the revised principles of co-sponsorship. He stated that mothers, newborns and adolescents would be central to the new UNAIDS strategy. The representative welcomed the strong engagement by UNICEF in the implementation of the strategy, which it hoped would foster alignment of the strategies of UNICEF and the other co-sponsors in the future.

## **D. UNICEF response to COVID-19**

- (a) Update on UNICEF humanitarian action: the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic**
- (b) Overview of the strategic repositioning of the UNICEF response and the way forward**

83. The Executive Director made introductory remarks and welcomed the two guest speakers from WHO: the Director-General and the Executive Director, Emergency Preparedness Response Programme. The Director, UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes, and the Director, Programme Division, jointly presented the update.

84. The Director-General reaffirmed the longstanding special relationship between WHO and UNICEF and thanked the UNICEF Executive Director for her leadership. He emphasized that the partnership between the organizations could be further strengthened to help countries to recover and rebuild by ensuring equitable access to vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics; supporting countries to maintain essential health services, including routine immunization for children; and investing in primary health care.

85. Several delegations commended UNICEF for its COVID-19 response, variously citing its speed, resilience, commitment and partnership focus. Several emphasized the need to make vaccines a global public good. A group of delegations encouraged UNICEF to prioritize its work on inclusion in its operations and partnerships; resilience, by systematically bringing together its humanitarian, development and gender expertise to improve the use of social protection services and education; and sustainability, by ensuring that the response to COVID-19 was sustainable and climate-friendly and did not exacerbate environmental challenges. The Director, Programme Division, reiterated that UNICEF had stayed and delivered across multiple contexts throughout the pandemic to track services to support children and propose solutions. He emphasized the focus on resilience and shock-responsive social protection systems as well as links to climate action in the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, such as climate-resilient WASH services and the inclusion of sustainable energy into WASH, health, nutrition and education programmes.

86. Another group of delegations encouraged UNICEF to prioritize the collection and use of sex-, age-, disability- and location-disaggregated data throughout the response. It emphasized the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights and integrating gender-transformative programming and a rights perspective in UNICEF humanitarian action. Commending UNICEF contributions to the localization agenda, the group stressed that the organization must go further to advance and strengthen local and national expertise and response capacity. The group stressed accountability to affected populations, strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and the importance of innovative financing and broadening the donor base. A delegation underscored the importance of partnerships in the response, and highlighted examples of UNICEF work with local authorities, institutions and community leaders.

87. The Director, UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes, emphasized the importance of preparedness; that getting the resources required to better prepare for emergency response was key; and that UNICEF needed to continue to focus on the issue in dialogue with the Member States. UNICEF was now reporting progress after encountering difficulties in consolidating government data lacking in disaggregation. Working with front-line partner organizations and local governments had been a requirement of the public health response. With WHO and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, UNICEF had done risk communication and community engagement work, which it hoped would become

more permanent in terms of fulfilling the organization's accountability to affected populations.

88. A delegation asked the Executive Director, WHO Emergency Preparedness Response Programme, to elaborate on progress in the set-up of the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool. He responded that work was under way on a private sector engagement strategy and an upcoming civil society consultation around this issue.

89. A delegation said that it would welcome information on the UNICEF commitment to addressing protection needs related to the pandemic as well as outbreak mitigation measures, particularly in relation to the most vulnerable children and families. The delegation encouraged UNICEF to include gender equality, women's empowerment and gender-based violence issues in its assessment and communication of the COVID-19 response. The Director, UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes, reported that UNICEF was trying to allocate more resources to the response to gender-based violence in the context of COVID-19. Flexible funding, which accounted for only 5 to 6 per cent of the funds received for the pandemic response, allowed UNICEF to be equitable and to support work on gender-based violence, child protection and WASH – sectors that tended to be neglected in public-health responses. The Director, Programme Division, provided examples of how UNICEF had accelerated efforts to address the challenges faced by girls and women since the start of the pandemic, including new and deepened partnerships to scale up digital solutions, and systems for conducting regular gender analysis and reviews at the country level.

90. A delegation called for special measures for several countries in conflict in the Middle East, due to the financial constraints caused by the pandemic. Another delegation spoke of the severe economic and social situation in their country, and the obstructed transfer of the support needed to mitigate the pandemic, which was due to conflict as well as the continuing imposition of unilateral coercive measures.

91. Two delegations emphasized the importance of facilitating access to the COVID-19 vaccine by the most vulnerable populations and enquired about progress made in targeting those groups. The Director, UNICEF Office of Emergency Programmes, reaffirmed that all UNICEF humanitarian assistance remained impartial and based on independent needs assessment, and that the organization was firmly committed to reaching the most vulnerable populations.

92. Another delegation sought clarification on how UNICEF had considered the report's statement that the emergency response should be seen within broader country-level strategies for building resilience and strengthening the links between humanitarian, development and peace programming and funding. The delegation also asked how UNICEF assessed the mainstreaming of disability inclusion in its COVID-19 response and how resources were allocated to this. UNICEF was encouraged to pay particular attention to women and girls with disabilities in crisis situations. The delegation stressed the importance of UNICEF support for existing social safety nets, while providing direct assistance to populations in need. The Director, Programme Division, agreed with the importance of integrating outcomes on disabilities across all UNICEF programmes, noting that this had been demonstrated through UNICEF support to school reopenings and child protection services.

93. A delegation urged UNICEF to maintain its humanitarian assistance under the leadership of national Governments and to scale up its cooperation with Governments and other relevant United Nations entities. It said that the right balance needed to be found between efforts to respond to COVID-19-related impacts and maintaining non-COVID-19 essential health care for children. The delegation said that education,

especially low-tech learning, should be another priority in UNICEF humanitarian assistance programmes, and that the organization should play a role in fighting the impact of poverty and eliminating the root causes of conflict and enforced displacement. The Director, Programme Division, reported that UNICEF spent around 70 per cent of its resources in fragile and conflict-affected settings, and more than 50 per cent in humanitarian action. In its next Strategic Plan, working towards a 2030 horizon, UNICEF aimed to strengthen its linked humanitarian, development and peace programming to reduce vulnerability, enhance national and local coping systems and capacities and address the drivers of fragility.

94. The Chair of the Standing Group of National Committees for UNICEF highlighted the excellent fundraising results achieved by the Committees in 2020 for the COVID-19 response. The Chair spoke of the Committees' evolving role for children, which had helped to further raise the UNICEF profile in the National Committee countries and to secure additional funds for children.

## **E. Evaluation reports and management responses**

### **Evaluation of UNICEF work for children in urban settings, and management response**

95. The Chief, Evaluation Office, presented the evaluation report, which was accompanied by a summary ([E/ICEF/2021/3](#)). The Deputy Director, Programme Division, presented the management response ([E/ICEF/2021/4](#)).

96. A group of delegations commended the positive and ambitious management response to the evaluation. They requested attention to marginalized and vulnerable children and the systematic use of multisectoral human rights-based and gender-transformative approaches, engagement with other partners and the non-duplication of roles. The Deputy Director, Programme Division, acknowledged the need to further strengthen the human rights-based approach to programming and to fully use gender-based, gender-responsive and gender-transformative ways of programming. The group of delegates also emphasized the importance of meaningful participation for children and youth in urban planning and decision-making.

97. The group of delegations noted the evaluation's finding that sector strategies for programming in urban settings were lacking, except for WASH and immunization. The Deputy Director, Programme Division, said UNICEF was looking at developing urban-specific strategies for other sectors as well and said that urban fragility was a priority, as was the need to link humanitarian and development programming during a humanitarian crisis. To the group's concern about the duplication of roles, the Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, said that because UNICEF country programmes were developed with national Governments and were therefore aligned with national cooperation frameworks, duplication would be avoided. The Deputy Director, Programme Division, said that UNICEF had a letter of engagement with UN-Habitat and would continue to leverage that agency's experience in urban programming, especially in such areas as urban planning and public spaces and urban data.

98. The group of delegations appreciated that UNICEF would consider urban contexts in relevant results areas and targets more strongly in the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 and that the organization was working to strengthen its organizational capacities in this area. The group also asked UNICEF management to provide a follow-up to the evaluation to the Board in 2023. The Deputy Director, Programme Division, said that UNICEF recognized the need to strengthen staff capacity and would welcome the opportunity to further report on progress in 2023.

99. The Chair of the Standing Group of National Committees said that National Committees were proud of the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative, which had helped locations in 25 countries to become beacons of child rights. The Initiative was so firmly embedded in National Committees that it had served as a platform for key interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chief, Evaluation Office, appreciated the role of the Spanish National Committee for UNICEF in the evaluation as a case study, while noting that the National Committees had not been the subjects of the evaluation, and the recommendations were directed at the UNICEF Programme Division.

100. The Chair of the Standing Group said that the case study on the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative in Spain was used to highlight good practice in a high-income country. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, noted the important role that National Committees played in advocating for child rights in high-income countries and said that the programming arm of UNICEF would be working closely with the National Committees.

#### **Evaluation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, and management response**

101. The Chief, Evaluation Office, presented the evaluation report, which was accompanied by a summary ([E/ICEF/2021/5](#)), after which the Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, provided the management response ([E/ICEF/2021/6](#)).

102. A group of delegations appreciated the commitment by UNICEF to involve children and young people in framing the new Strategic Plan but noted that such participation needed to continue throughout the programmatic life cycle. A delegation echoed the evaluation's recommendation that UNICEF further support children's and young people's role as advocates, partners and change agents. A representative of the European Union agreed with the need to better include the voices of children in planning and implementation. The Chief, Evaluation Office, appreciated the delegations' emphasis on children's meaningful participation.

103. The group of delegations welcomed the focus on outcome-level results but wondered how reducing the number of outcomes and adding flexibility to programming decisions would affect the design of the new Strategic Plan. A longer-term, outcome-focused strategy was also supported by the representative of the European Union, who noted that strengthened reporting and a focus on outcomes would help to secure adequate funding for the Plan. The Chief, Evaluation Office, said that the shift to an outcome-level approach would not diminish the responsibility to report on results and that there was good capacity at the field level to report on outputs. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, said that UNICEF was focused on making the next Strategic Plan a high-level framework for clear child outcomes applicable to different types of settings, with decisions on how to achieve those made within countries.

104. The group of delegations appreciated the commitment to multisectoral approaches and to aligning the forthcoming Strategic Plan with the Gender Policy and Gender Action Plan. The Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, noted the feedback and guidance from delegations on gender equality and gender-transformative programming. A delegation also emphasized the need to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment into programming and to report against high-level gender results, a point also made by the group of delegations. The Director, Programme Division, noted that the new Strategic Plan would reflect gender as a change strategy in addition to specific gender outcomes.

105. The group of delegations and another delegation emphasized the importance of reducing silos by using the multisectoral approach and fostering staff flexibility to

work in both humanitarian and development contexts. The representative of the European Union welcomed the evaluation's recommendation in this regard, as well as the recommendation of a longer-term strategy aligned with the 2030 Agenda. The Director, Programme Division, said that UNICEF had good examples of the multisectoral approach from the pandemic response in work with parents and caregivers, in such areas as mental health and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach.

106. A delegation, along with the group of delegations, emphasized the importance the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach for UNICEF work and the need for a supporting comprehensive analysis. The Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, noted the strong support for work on humanitarian-development-peace programming. UNICEF intended to build on examples of such programming from the COVID-19 response, which would require flexible funding.

107. A delegation said that since private sector engagement was receiving increasing attention within UNICEF, the organization should ensure that the new Strategic Plan provided a framework for such engagement along with guidance for country offices. The Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, thanked the delegation for the suggestions regarding ensuring that private sector work did not compromise the Children's Rights and Business Principles. The Director, Programme Division, noted that UNICEF had specific strategies, including ongoing capacity development for staff, around private sector engagement.

108. A delegation highlighted the concern reported in the evaluation about protecting and promoting the organization's mission as a child right's organization and asked how UNICEF would address this concern. The Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, said that the guidance for UNICEF was to focus on inequity, ensure the centrality of the voices of children and uphold humanitarian principles. UNICEF supported individual country offices to find the best ways to ensure that the rights of children were upheld at all levels, at all stages of programming.

109. The group of delegations and two other delegations emphasized the need for more profound change strategies in the new Strategic Plan. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, said the Plan would be based on a theory of change with explicit assumptions, based on strong theoretical and empirical foundations.

110. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/3 (see annex I).

**F. Oral update on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system**

111. The Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, introduced the item, and the Deputy Director, Public Partnerships Division, presented the update.

112. A group of delegations noted that the text of the QCPR contained strategies around climate and biodiversity issues, persons with disabilities, digital technologies and other areas, setting the tone for greener and more-inclusive development, particularly post-pandemic; the QCPR encouraged progress on interlinked agendas of biodiversity and climate change. The Deputy Director, Public Partnerships Division, said the QCPR was a navigational chart for policy guidance and would enable collective strategic contribution towards the Decade of Action.

113. The group called for the monitoring and reporting framework for the QCPR to have clear, evidence-based indicators for agencies to use. The Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, said that the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs was in charge of developing the monitoring framework and that UNICEF was engaged.

114. Noting the QCPR focus on the poorest and most vulnerable, the group highlighted the importance of gender mainstreaming and gender equality, the significance of girls' education and the realization of human rights. It welcomed dialogue on how the new strategic plans of the funds and programmes would help to meet these ambitious targets.

115. Two delegations commended UNICEF work in partnership with other agencies. One delegation hoped that a more interconnected United Nations development system would accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and achieve better results for children and underlined the importance of alignment in various areas. A delegation welcomed the continued dialogue around the alignment of cooperation frameworks and CPDs. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, and the Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, said that collaborating with other agencies was important because such work was critical to achieving the outcomes that UNICEF aimed to achieve and delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals.

116. A delegation asked how country-level United Nations development system reform could be strengthened while making full use of each agency's comparative advantage. The Deputy Director, Public Partnerships Division, said that the best opportunity for coherence was the reporting and monitoring framework, which would allow comparability across United Nations entities.

117. A delegation noted that, as of 2021, 50 per cent of the organization's field, zonal and regional office space was now part of common premises and asked whether cost savings had resulted. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, responded UNICEF was proud of the 50 per cent, but could do more; she said that UNICEF would revert to Member States on the specific cost savings to date. The Deputy Executive Director said that with other agencies UNICEF was studying the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various efforts, including shared premises. She also said UNICEF was encouraging its teams to use the mutual recognition framework more fully to make use of other agencies' policies.

118. A delegation asked about UNICEF engagement with the new regional collaborative platforms. The Regional Director, Middle East and North Africa, told delegations of the UNICEF use of Manara, a regional data hub for sharing knowledge products across the United Nations system and which was also accessible to Member States and partners. UNICEF was also involved in issue-based coalitions in the region, and in a regional peer group for technical colleagues supporting the development of the UNSDCFs. The Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, thanked the delegations for emphasizing the United Nations reform at the regional level.

## **G. UNICEF financial report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2019 and report of the Board of Auditors, and management response**

119. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, introduced the UNICEF financial report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2019 and report of the Board of Auditors ([A/75/5/Add.3](#)). The Director of External Audit, Chile, representing the United Nations Board of Auditors, presented the report of the Board of Auditors. The Comptroller and Director, Division of Financial and Administrative Management presented the financial report and audited financial statements as well

as the management response to the report of the Board of Auditors (E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.2).

120. A group of delegations and another delegation noted the unqualified audit opinion received by UNICEF. The group also acknowledged the organization's high liquidity and strong solvency and noted the importance for UNICEF of a stable financial footing to fulfil its mandate.

121. The group welcomed more information on the organization's policy for investing its financial assets ethically and in an eco-friendly way. The Comptroller said that UNICEF was not aware of any unethical investment; nothing had come to the attention of any oversight body that had reviewed the UNICEF treasury operations.

122. The group encouraged UNICEF to address recurring areas of identified weaknesses, including continued shortfalls in the harmonized approach to cash transfer (HACT) assurance activities by UNICEF regional and country offices, and analyse reasons for these recurring issues. The Comptroller responded that some of the recommendations might sound the same due to their classification but were not necessarily so. He noted that some HACT issues were context-specific, and in those cases, UNICEF did not achieve the baselines it had set for itself.

123. The group of delegations asked for more information on the delayed delivery of one quarter of emergency orders in 2019, and how UNICEF was addressing this. The Comptroller said that supplies delayed beyond 60 days in 2019 amounted to only 0.5 per cent of emergency supplies.

124. A delegation thanked UNICEF for the level of detail provided in the management response to the audit, which indicated that the audit recommendations were well understood. The delegation requested information on how the 2019 decrease in voluntary contributions, especially to regular resources, affected operations and programming, and on trends in this regard for 2020 and 2021. The Comptroller said the reduction was only about \$0.2 billion for 2019. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, added that, even with higher revenue in 2020, the decrease in core resources as a percentage of overall resources was concerning.

125. A delegation urged UNICEF to review and strengthen the programme monitoring system to ensure the effective achievement of planned results and reduce risks; the group of delegations also encouraged continued actions to improve and more fully utilize the enterprise risk management system and increase its integration into country offices.

126. A delegation asked that UNICEF share its consolidated fraud risk assessment with the Executive Board. The group of delegations recognized the continuing impacts of COVID-19 and related risks in the financial realm, including the risk of diversion of funds from their intended use. The group asked that UNICEF ensure an appropriate level of programmatic visits and spot checks, adhering to HACT minimum levels. Another delegation noted UNICEF work to develop minimum requirements for spot checks.

127. The Comptroller said that UNICEF took fraud seriously and had an anti-fraud strategy that included a policy, guidance and a capacity-building component for implementing partners. UNICEF had also revamped its enterprise risk management system. A representative of the European Union appreciated the organization's collaboration with other agencies to develop and implement a fraud awareness online training addressed specifically to implementing partners.

128. The representative of the European Union welcomed the Board of Auditors' recommendations on cost recovery and reiterated the importance of harmonizing the



cost-recovery methodology and rates among all United Nations entities. The Comptroller said that UNICEF chaired the technical working group on system-wide cost-recovery harmonization, but there were challenges because some specialized agencies did not come under the jurisdiction of the joint Board decision on the harmonization of cost recovery.

129. One delegation requested clarification on the percentage increase in staff costs vis-à-vis programme expenses. The Comptroller said that in 2019 there had been an increase in internal oversight staff, but in absolute dollar amounts programme expenses had not decreased. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, said that UNICEF hoped to set an organizational goal for the size and scale of its work and determine a level of acceptable growth.

130. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/4 (see annex I).

## **H. Private Fundraising and Partnerships: 2021 workplan and proposed budget**

131. The Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, introduced the item, followed by the Director, Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division, who presented the workplan and proposed budget (E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.1). The Comptroller and Director, Division of Financial and Administrative Management, then presented the addenda to the report: the Dynamo Revolving Fund for investment in private sector fundraising and the World Bank instrument to facilitate sustained investment in private sector fundraising (E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.1/Add.1 and E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.1/Add.2).

132. A group of delegations asked how UNICEF could convince additional individual donors that unearmarked funds were critical to its work and crisis response. The Director, Private Fundraising and Partnerships, said that the majority of unearmarked funding came from individuals and that UNICEF would keep investing in growth in that sector. UNICEF was striving for allocation excellence in investments; its analysis had shown that the 18 emerging markets identified had proven track records. The group also asked whether the strong 2020 performance was a realistic baseline for future projections. The Director, Private Fundraising and Partnerships, said that her team was still analysing to what extent the successful performance in 2020 was due, respectively, to the pandemic and to the growth trend in individual giving.

133. The group encouraged UNICEF to allocate investment funds strategically as well as to strike a balance between financial and non-financial business partnerships and measure the results of its corporate engagement. A delegation expressed its support for UNICEF efforts to build public-private partnerships to leverage resources and expertise, but urged that fundraising efforts remain impartial.

134. The group of delegations asked for more information on the relationship between the two new financial instruments, and on their relationship to regular investment funds and to UNICEF expenses in the countries in question. The group also sought clarification on oversight. Noting the similarities between the new Dynamo Revolving Fund, the longstanding Bridge Fund and the proposed World Bank instrument, a delegation questioned how UNICEF intended to ensure their complementarity. The Comptroller said that the Dynamo Revolving Fund was a pooled fund created to attract voluntary contributions to complement the UNICEF special purpose budget over the longer-term. The World Bank instrument would enable UNICEF to generate resources from the capital market to invest in fundraising, and part of the return would be used to pay off the investment. The Board would have full oversight and receive regular updates.

135. Regarding the World Bank instrument, a delegation cited the potential reputational risks and asked if the instrument was a pilot programme. The Director, Private Fundraising and Partnerships, said that UNICEF would be the first United Nations agency to employ such an instrument and that, based on how it went, other agencies could potentially replicate it.

136. The Chair of the Standing Group of National Committees for UNICEF expressed pride in the results achieved by the Committees in 2020. The Chair said that while many Committees would continue to self-invest in new fundraising techniques, others would welcome investment funds from UNICEF. Several delegations applauded UNICEF for its private sector fundraising results in 2020 and its use of innovative instruments.

137. The Executive Director said that revolving funds were often used in running national bilateral development programmes and that these vehicles would serve UNICEF and the United Nations well. The Bridge Fund and the Boards of the National Committees had long been consulted about the types of proposals and organization that had been put forward in the World Bank instrument. She said that the Executive Board would have its usual full, transparent oversight and provided assurances that UNICEF was being conservative yet forward-looking in order to capitalize on fundraising in a fiercely competitive and fast-moving world.

138. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/5 (see annex I).

139. Following adoption, a group of delegations expressed satisfaction that agreement had been reached on the agenda item but noted its concerns with how the World Bank instrument had been presented to the Board. The group requested regular annual updates at the first regular session on its financial performance and the attainment of goals, costs and capacities. The group urged that, ahead of plans for future instruments, UNICEF brief the Board with adequate time for consultations.

## **I. Other matters**

### **Provisional list of agenda items for the 2021 annual session.**

140. The provisional list was presented by the Secretary of the Executive Board.

## **J. Adoption of draft decisions**

141. The Executive Board adopted decisions 2021/1 through 2021/5 (see annex I).

## **K. Closing statements by the Executive Director of UNICEF and the President of the Executive Board**

142. The Executive Director expressed her appreciation for the support and guidance of the Executive Board, which had allowed UNICEF staff to stand with children throughout the pandemic. She said that ending the pandemic would require a global approach, including a massive push to increase the production of vaccines and ensure their equitable distribution. During the session, it had been useful to hear the perspectives of counterparts from WHO, with whom UNICEF was proud to stand, along with its other global partners, in response to the crisis.

143. UNICEF would play a key role in the global recovery. The organization's new Strategic Plan would reflect its commitment to a rights-based approach as well as the guidance provided by the QCPR. The Plan would reflect areas of work, including climate change and environmental risks, where more needed to be done. UNICEF would seek to involve young people as active problem-solvers in their neighbourhoods and communities. The organization was committed to strengthening

its engagement, capacity and programming in urban settings, another area in which focus was needed. Programming would continue to be adapted to ensure better linkages between UNICEF humanitarian and development work. To bring about gender equality and foster peace in fragile contexts, communities would be supported to develop systems that could support people at every life stage.

144. UNICEF was standing with its sister agencies to continue the vital process of reform of the United Nations development system and of finding ways to maximize the collective impact in support of children and young people. The organization was forging new partnerships and approaches with the private sector to benefit from its ideas and innovation. Taking note of the statement made by a group of delegations in relation to the new World Bank financial instrument, the Executive Director thanked them for their counsel and expressed her commitment to reporting on its performance.

145. The Executive Director also thanked the Executive Board for its insight, views and support of the CPDs, and its support of the ongoing organizational improvements. She said that UNICEF was deeply appreciative of the trust and generosity of Governments and other donors. However, children would continue to need support as their countries and communities struggled to recover from the pandemic and economic growth stagnated. The Executive Director renewed her call for more flexible regular resources, as called for in the QCPR, and urged Member States to strive to achieve the funding compact target.

146. The President thanked the delegations and representatives of UNICEF for thorough discussions, insights and hard work during this first regular session. The Board had adopted five formal decisions, which were crucial for the effective work of the organization, including the approval of 11 CPDs that would guide UNICEF engagement on the country level.

147. The President said that the COVID-19 pandemic had brought unprecedented challenges to everybody, so it was no surprise that the pandemic and its implications for UNICEF work were key topics of the deliberations. UNICEF and partners had addressed new challenges while never losing sight of the longer-term perspective and putting the needs of children above all.

148. The President was pleased that the Director-General of WHO had joined its deliberations on the same day that UNICEF and WHO had together called for global leadership to scale up COVID-19 vaccine production and achieve vaccine equity.

149. Presentations of several evaluations, one on the current UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and the other on work for children in urban settings, together with their management responses, were more building blocks in the trust that UNICEF had built over many years. UNICEF had also received an unqualified audit opinion from the United Nations Board of Auditors, and the UNICEF Executive Board had approved a financial instrument to help to fund the organization's work.

150. During the session, the Board had gained a vision of an organization that would not stand still in its search for excellence, would not stand still as long as any child, anywhere, remained in need of health care, protection, education, clean water or social support.

151. The President said that she was optimistic for children because, during the session, she had heard from directors, managers, experts and delegates who were unrelenting in their quest for excellence in what they did, because they did it to improve children's lives.

152. The development of the new Strategic Plan would be foremost in the months ahead and it was the intention of the Board to organize as many informal meetings and consultations as necessary to ensure that the process would open, informative and

inclusive. There were so many complex challenges ahead and so many children in need, and it was the Board's responsibility to assist and guide UNICEF to reach as many children as possible.

153. The President expressed her heartfelt thanks to her colleagues on the Bureau, the facilitators of draft decisions, the members of the Board and the staff of the UNICEF secretariat. To UNICEF staff around the world, she said the Board was inspired to know that they stayed and delivered results for children, even in exceptional circumstances.

154. The President thanked the Office of the Secretary of the Executive Board and the Executive Director of UNICEF.

155. The Board was looking ahead to a full year of work, the President said, one with many challenges, but also with many opportunities to do and deliver more for children, this year and throughout the Decade of Action.

**Part two**  
**Annual session of 2021**

**Held at United Nations Headquarters from**  
**1 to 4 June 2021**

## **I. Organization of the session**

### **A. Adoption of the provisional annotated agenda, timetable and organization of work**

156. The Executive Board adopted the agenda, timetable and organization of work (E/ICEF/2021/9) for the session.

157. In accordance with Rule 50 and the annex to the Rules of Procedure, the Secretary of the Executive Board announced that credentials had been submitted by 30 observer delegations, including one inter-governmental organization, one international organization, six non-governmental organizations and four National Committees for UNICEF.

### **B. Opening statements by the President of the Executive Board and the Executive Director of UNICEF**

158. The President of the Executive Board and Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations, H.E. Rytis Paulauskas, opened the annual session of the Executive Board. He thanked the UNICEF Executive Director for her stewardship of the organization during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the staff for their heroic efforts, noting the way they had sprung into action when the crisis hit.

159. Commenting that 2021 was the seventy-fifth anniversary year of UNICEF, the President called for reflection and renewal. He urged support for the organization's efforts to meet the targets of its current Strategic Plan and finalize the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. The new Plan was aimed at driving the systemic change needed to make measurable progress for children and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

160. The President noted that the most harmful effects of the pandemic had fallen disproportionately on children in the most vulnerable communities, and that more needed to be done to ensure equitable access to vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. He echoed the Executive Director's call for nations to donate excess vaccine supplies through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility.

161. The President recognized how disruptive the pandemic had been to critical vaccinations for children. UNICEF had reported that approximately 80 million children under the age of 1 year in at least 68 countries could miss out on vaccines, putting them at risk of serious disease and death.

162. The President cited pandemic-related disruptions beyond health care that had negatively impacted children. Up to 1.6 billion children had been affected by school closures and more than half of the world's children and young people lacked digital connectivity, with no access to remote learning opportunities. An estimated 23.8 million children were likely to drop out of school, with girls at higher risk.

163. Citing UNICEF efforts to support learning through the global online Learning Passport and the Giga initiative, which was aimed at accelerating connectivity worldwide, the President emphasized the gaps still to be addressed, highlighting in particular the needs of children with disabilities.

164. The President expressed concern for children impacted by humanitarian crises and the escalation of violence in 2020. The number of refugees worldwide had doubled over the previous decade to 20 million, half of whom were children.

165. The President welcomed the development of the first-ever Global Innovation Strategy for UNICEF, launched in 2020. He noted that nine new frontier technology solutions had been developed in 14 countries, including the use of artificial intelligence for real-time insights to inform policies and chatbots that could provide information in 100 languages for the COVID-19 response.

166. Recognizing the value of the strong partnerships of UNICEF with the private sector, the President reported that 108 countries had worked with 4,337 businesses, reaching an estimated 133 million children in 2020, almost quadruple the previous year's number.

167. The President noted that UNICEF had accelerated its climate programming, emphasizing the importance of climate-resilient health, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and educational services, and that 46 countries had implemented climate-resilient WASH solutions through programmes supported by UNICEF, reaching 6 million people.

168. He commented on the organization's record-breaking 2020 income of \$7.5 billion, but expressed concern over the continued decline in the ratio of core resources to other resources, which compromised the ability of UNICEF to swiftly react to sudden-onset emergencies.

169. In closing, the President looked forward to a productive session and thanked UNICEF for its hard work in developing the new Strategic Plan.

170. The Executive Director affirmed that the seventy-fifth anniversary year of UNICEF would be one of rededication to the organization's mission, citing the fragile nature of progress, as exemplified by the global impact of COVID-19. She cautioned that the pandemic continued to inflict damage, notably in the form of dwindling incomes and unequal vaccine distribution.

171. She expressed concern that, rather than coming together to fight COVID-19, the world was experiencing worsening humanitarian emergencies and violence. Expressing gratitude to the global staff of UNICEF, the Executive Director noted the ways in which they had adapted services and programming to overcome the barriers imposed by the COVID-19 lockdowns.

172. The Executive Director highlighted the critical role of UNICEF in the COVAX Facility, which leveraged the organization's longstanding vaccine experience. She pointed to UNICEF work with communities, manufacturers and transportation and logistics companies to procure and transport supplies, and to deliver and administer the vaccines in 92 low- and middle-income countries.

173. The Executive Director reported that 2020 had been a record-breaking year for increases in public- and private-sector funding, primarily for earmarked funding for programmes related to the COVID-19 response. In terms of expenditures, 2020 was also a record-breaker as UNICEF crossed, for the first time, \$6.5 billion in expenditures (4 per cent higher than in 2019).

174. Against this backdrop and the ongoing needs of the COVID-19 response, the Executive Director emphasized that flexible and unearmarked funding was critical to the ability of UNICEF to mount a lasting response to the pandemic.

175. The Executive Director announced that UNICEF was creating its first-ever global innovative finance strategy to help to accelerate and direct financial flows, and was exploring numerous solutions, including blended financing instruments that combined public and private funding.

176. Referencing the progress on the new UNICEF Strategic Plan, the Executive Director looked forward to the discussion of the results framework and the ways in

which the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR) was helping to shape the development of the Plan. As an example, she cited the Gender Action Plan and the ways in which gender equality was woven throughout UNICEF programming.

177. The Executive Director reported on innovations that were accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, including solar-powered water systems; the Giga initiative to improve connectivity; the use of satellite data to predict population movements and malnutrition levels; the use of digital fundraising and blockchain, including the CryptoFund, the UNICEF prototype fund for exploring the use of digital currencies; and work with private-sector partners on the development of artificial intelligence-powered products to support children and young people.

178. The Executive Director announced that UNICEF was discussing three flagship initiatives with the United Nations family: (a) Reimagine Education, to provide access to digital learning and skills for all children and young people; (b) Water Security for All, a plan to provide safe and affordable drinking water, climate-resilient WASH services and water cooperation for peace and stability; and (c) No Time to Waste, a plan to prevent, detect and treat wasting in early childhood.

179. Emphasizing the need to streamline operations and reduce costs, the Executive Director highlighted the increased focus of UNICEF on engaging with other United Nations agencies and partners to find efficiencies and reduce duplication.

180. The Executive Director announced her receipt of the final report of the Internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination and emphasized the organization's ongoing journey to strengthen the organizational culture of UNICEF and to end racism and discrimination throughout its operations.

181. Following the opening statement of the Executive Director, a video about the UNICEF work in COVID-19 vaccine procurement and distribution through the COVAX Facility was presented.

## **II. Deliberations of the Executive Board**

### **A. Annual report for 2020 of the Executive Director of UNICEF**

182. The President introduced the first substantive item of the day: the presentation of the annual report for 2020 of the Executive Director of UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2021/10](#) and [E/ICEF/2021/10/Corr.1](#)). The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, introduced the report, which covered the third year of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2022, followed by the Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, who presented an overview.

183. Numerous delegations welcomed the results of the report and thanked UNICEF for its extraordinary efforts during a tumultuous year. Several delegations voiced appreciation for the critical work of UNICEF carried out in the challenging context of the pandemic.

184. Several delegations noted that, despite positive outputs, results for children were lagging, as the pandemic had plunged millions of children into deep levels of poverty, hunger, illiteracy and vulnerability, with 240 million children missing in-person classroom instruction and around 150 million pushed into multidimensional poverty. Against the backdrop of the first global increase in poverty in 20 years, one delegation highlighted the determination of UNICEF to reach the poorest and most marginalized children.

185. Commending UNICEF on its contributions to strengthening the United Nations development system, two delegations expressed appreciation for the organization's



efficiency in adapting to the realities of COVID-19 and delivering efficiently and effectively on the ground.

186. Numerous delegations were pleased to note that UNICEF, leveraging its longstanding vaccine experience and expertise, was playing a leading role in the procurement and distribution of vaccines through the COVAX Facility, with two delegations commending the organization's work with community health workers to deliver and administer vaccines in 92 low- and middle-income countries.

187. Citing the persistent global vaccine divide, several delegations urged UNICEF to improve equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and called for coordinated global action to reach universal coverage by the end of the year. Pointing out that less than 2 per cent of the combined populations of least developed countries had been vaccinated, a delegation called upon UNICEF to prioritize those countries and other low-coverage countries for vaccine distribution through the COVAX Facility.

188. Numerous delegations commented on the significant consequences of COVID-19 on the everyday lives of children everywhere, noting that the pandemic had compounded existing vulnerabilities and inequalities, with girls and children in conflict and humanitarian situations and those driven into extreme poverty or affected by disasters at highest risk. Delegations noted that COVID-19 had also amplified health inequalities and learning gaps, especially for the most marginalized children, impacted mental health and spurred an increase in domestic violence. The impacts of the pandemic threatened to roll back hard-earned development gains and hamper progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

189. Several delegations called for strengthening health care, education and social welfare systems to meet the multidimensional challenges of the pandemic, including increasing investments in digital learning platforms and immunization and nutrition services. Several delegations emphasized the importance of maintaining regular programming during the pandemic as well as ensuring the continuity of critical services to safeguard the health and survival of the world's most vulnerable children. The Executive Director reassured the delegations that such core programmes remained at the centre of UNICEF activities.

190. A delegation noted that the pandemic had exposed the gaping global digital gap and its impact on education, citing the estimated 1.6 billion children worldwide who had been affected by school closures due to COVID-19 and the limited technological capacity in many countries that would continue to deprive one-third of them of education. Several delegations welcomed the work that UNICEF had done to ensure digital tools for connectivity so that classes could continue and urged UNICEF to prioritize online and distance learning and universal digital inclusion. Several delegations also welcomed the flagship Giga initiative to expand Internet access to every child, community and school, expressing support for the initiative's focus on leveraging resources, partnerships and technology.

191. A delegation stressed that bridging the digital gap should leave no one behind, especially girls, and should prioritize young people's employment and empowerment, especially for those with disabilities. Another delegation noted that, while access to digital technologies should be a right for all children, the rising use of technology exacerbated their risk for being subjected to violence in digital contexts, including sexual harassment, cyberbullying, hate speech and exploitation and sexual abuse, and urged UNICEF to work closely with academic institutions to carry out in-depth research on such impacts. The delegation also expressed concern over the medium and long-term effects of the pandemic on the mental health of children and young people.

192. A group of delegations welcomed efforts to develop artificial intelligence-powered projects aimed at improving education, supporting children with disabilities and introducing young people to the job market. They commended the efforts of UNICEF to modernize learning and skills through the Generation Unlimited partnership.

193. A group of delegations highlighted that the pandemic had created a new way of working and a new set of priorities and actions that UNICEF could leverage; to ensure an equitable recovery, it was essential to act on those lessons. Several delegations noted the organization's increased agility and its embrace of innovation, technology and new approaches to accelerate results. The UNICEF COVID-19 response had also shown where the organization had a comparative advantage, which was notably in the areas of vaccination, nutrition and education.

194. Several delegations noted that the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic had led to international actions and innovations that had laid a foundation for the improved delivery of future humanitarian and development programmes. They added that UNICEF and Member States should redouble their collective efforts to resolve the underlying causes of fragility, including adopting cross-cutting programmes to promote resilience and peacebuilding.

195. A delegation expressed concern over the decrease in regular resources and stressed the need for additional core and programme funds, urging global solidarity among Member States. Several delegations emphasized that core resources allowed for flexibility in meeting unexpected needs, notably to ensure an efficient, swift and agile response to emergencies, as well as to enable UNICEF to meet its mandate, as underscored by the COVID-19 crisis. Two delegations called for the mobilization of funds specifically to deal with humanitarian crises, with one delegation urging cross-sectoral assistance to ensure the protection of children's rights.

196. Several delegations noted that 2020 had been a record-breaking fundraising year for UNICEF, several delegations said that innovative financing strategies were needed to enhance fundraising, as was working in partnership with international financial institutions, while the effective use of resources should be maximized. Several delegations expressed appreciation to UNICEF for moving towards such financing strategies. A delegation expressed interest in learning more about the rapidly growing UNICEF Innovation Fund, including its CryptoFund.

197. A group of delegations underscored the importance of building efficiency through common services under the "One United Nations" initiative. To advance reform commitments geared towards more harmonized, efficient and robust policies and programmatic approaches, UNICEF should be guided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs). A delegation asked about the organization's efforts to transition the Information and Communication Technology Division to lower-cost locations.

198. A delegation was encouraged by the focus of UNICEF on driving catalytic change and advocated for structural, systemic transformation to overcome global challenges. Stressing that UNICEF could not succeed on its own, the delegation encouraged partnerships among sister agencies to achieve the necessary collaborative strength. The focus should not be on complementary programming, but rather on joint approaches for lasting impact. A group of delegations encouraged UNICEF to broaden its partnerships to actors outside the United Nations system, including with local actors.

199. Numerous delegations appreciated the consultative development of the draft UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 and noted its strong foundation as a guide for UNICEF work in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. They welcomed the

commitment to addressing the climate crisis, including reducing the environmental impact of UNICEF operations and promoting child-sensitive climate policies; the gender-transformative ambitions; the focus on resilience and peacebuilding; the emphasis on child protection; the reaffirmation of the rights of children with disabilities as a cross-cutting priority, along with inclusive education; and the dual humanitarian-development mandate as a guide for the long-term strategy. A delegation said that UNICEF should extend protection to young people aged 19 to 25 years. A delegation noted UNICEF support to family-friendly programmes in 46 countries and to children without families and called for incorporating such issues into the new Strategic Plan. Another delegation called for prioritizing the needs of children in humanitarian crises, while a delegation emphasized that the new Strategic Plan should contribute to enhancing resilience and preparedness for future crises.

200. Several delegations referred to the Decade of Action towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and their hope that the new UNICEF Strategic Plan would enable UNICEF to make greater contributions towards the Goals and rebuilding a post-pandemic world.

201. A group of delegations welcomed the UNICEF efforts to accelerate actions during the last year of the current Strategic Plan to achieve strong gender equality outcomes, while a delegation challenged UNICEF to address the root causes of gender inequality, including barriers to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to develop expertise on how to best support LGBTI children and young people and their communities. Two delegations expressed support for UNICEF work to scale up national efforts to prevent gender-based violence and encouraged UNICEF to place gender equality at the heart of its programming, including in the provision of services related to COVID-19.

202. Recalling that 2021 was the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour, a delegation asked UNICEF to make the elimination of the worst forms of child labour a programmatic priority, and to step up the fight against the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

203. Several delegations noted with concern allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse against UNICEF, and encouraged UNICEF to continue to strive for an organizational culture in which no allegation was ignored and no sexual misconduct was deemed acceptable. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, affirmed that investigation of the case in question was being finalized, in consultation with the United Nations and other agencies. She also noted that UNICEF was discussing with the regional directors how to increase capacity to address the challenge of sexual exploitation and abuse.

204. A delegation welcomed the completion of the final report of the Internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination, eagerly anticipated its release to the Executive Board. The delegation encouraged the Executive Director to provide appropriate resources to implement its recommendations.

205. A delegation expressed support for mutual accountability between resident coordinators and United Nations agencies within the management accountability framework, and looked forward to the upcoming review of resident coordinator activities.

206. Numerous delegations congratulated UNICEF on its seventy-fifth anniversary year, emphasizing that it was not only a time to reflect on past achievements, but an opportunity to build back better for future generations.

207. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/6 (see annex I).

## **B. UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, draft for review**

208. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, introduced the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, draft for review ([E/ICEF/2021/12](#)), followed by the Director, Division of Data Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, who presented an overview.

209. A delegation highlighted two priorities for the new Strategic Plan: delivery for the most-vulnerable children and an intersectional approach to inequality and discrimination. The delegation cited the need to plan for effective delivery in differing contexts, particularly in small island developing States.

210. A group of delegations said that the draft Strategic Plan reflected the urgency of the current situation and commended the inclusive approach to its development, including consultations with children and young people. A delegation encouraged the organization to focus on its mandate to work with people under 18 years of age.

211. The group of delegations reiterated the importance of aligning the Plan with the 2020 QCPR and noted with approval that the Plan would strengthen UNICEF work on social protection, child poverty, climate and resilience and the integration of humanitarian and development and peacebuilding efforts.

212. The group of delegations and another delegation called for the systematic reflection and monitoring of human rights, including in terms of gender equality and the rights of persons with disabilities, in the results framework; this necessitated the disaggregation of the relevant indicators across all five Goal Areas. The group encouraged UNICEF to strengthen Governments and other duty bearers to meet their legal obligations and human rights holders to claim their rights. The group called for a strong focus in the new Strategic Plan on comprehensive sexuality education, which could provide boys and girls with the knowledge they needed to protect themselves and to make informed decisions about their lives. A delegation called for the Strategic Plan to prioritize meaningful protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and strong accountability mechanisms and indicators.

213. While commending the inclusion of resilience as a cross-cutting priority, the group of delegations emphasized that humanitarian assistance went beyond resilience; humanitarian principles were fundamental in all humanitarian efforts, and the group called for this to be reflected in the results framework. A delegation encouraged UNICEF to ensure that its humanitarian work contributed to strengthening its development mandate, in line with United Nations guidelines.

214. Another group of delegations welcomed the focus on addressing the underlying causes of children’s vulnerability, leveraging financing for children, providing access to essential supplies and services, brokering global partnerships for children and supporting families and parenting. The group said that mobilizing resources to meet children’s needs and working with their families should remain at the core of UNICEF work to assist programme countries to protect children in a way that built the foundation for lasting development. The group called for Governments to prioritize children in their budget-allocation schemes and to support families in innovative ways as they coped with the ongoing fallout of the pandemic. The group also called for the new Strategic Plan to reflect UNICEF compliance with its mandate in areas in which it had a comparative advantage as well as with United Nations-agreed terminology. A delegation also expressed concern over the use of non-agreed terminology, specifically “sexual and reproductive health and rights” and “sexual orientation and gender identity”

215. The group of delegations expressed confidence that, given its guiding principles, including anti-racism and non-discrimination, access and equity, the new Strategic Plan would help to advance socioeconomic changes at the country level by 2025.

216. A delegation noted its concurrence with the group statement and added that the Strategic Plan should focus on supporting traditional families. Another delegation noted the centrality of family life for children, and called for UNICEF to involve parents in its work to grant agency to children.

217. A delegation encouraged UNICEF to continue to improve programme outcomes and impact by addressing social, political and economic factors that constrained breakthroughs to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including the incorporation of lessons learned during the COVID-19 response, while several delegations expressed appreciation for the centrality of gender in the new Plan. Several other delegations said that it was important for the Strategic Plan to take into consideration the priorities and sociocultural contexts of programme countries, including in its references to the role of the family as well as to sexual orientation, gender identity and gender-transformative approaches. The Director, Division of Data Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, stressed that all UNICEF priorities at the country level were oriented to meet national priorities, as national ownership was crucial for every UNSDCF and country programme document (CPD). The Director, Programme Division, affirmed the delegations' emphasis on families and parents, and added that gender-transformative programming referred to interventions that explicitly addressed the structural causes of the different outcomes between boys and girls.

218. A delegation called for the Strategic Plan to place greater emphasis on driving change and achieving outcomes, not only outputs, noting that this would require intensified efforts in outcome monitoring and sufficient funding for impact and outcome evaluation. While such an emphasis would best be achieved through cross-cutting and joint programming addressing multidimensional needs, it should not cloud the attribution of specific UNICEF contributions. A group of delegations emphasized the importance of focusing on the ways in which UNICEF would work effectively with entities with overlapping mandates.

### **Special focus session on the Global Polio Eradication Initiative**

219. The Chair introduced the special focus session on the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, which he said urgently needed renewed support from donors in light of the COVID-19 pandemic's disruption of immunization and other child health services.

220. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, introduced the guest speaker, Dr. Christopher Elias, President of the Global Development Division at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Chair of the Initiative's Polio Oversight Board. The UNICEF Director for Polio Eradication preceded the guest speaker with an overview of the status of polio eradication and the new global strategy for its completion.

221. Dr. Elias noted that the Gates Foundation and UNICEF had deepened their collaboration in many areas, including in polio immunization. While citing progress, including the 2020 certification of the Africa region as free of wild polio virus, he emphasized the challenges posed by the pandemic and outbreaks of vaccine-derived polio. It was necessary for UNICEF and other partners in the Initiative to deploy innovative tools and tactics to reach all children in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the last remaining polio-endemic countries, and to halt outbreaks of vaccine-derived polio by rolling out the novel oral polio vaccine.

222. Several delegations pointed to the importance of integrated, holistic delivery of immunization along with other services to reach the most vulnerable communities, and asked how UNICEF was supporting such integration. The Director for Polio Eradication affirmed that integrated campaigns and community engagement were key parts of the eradication strategy, and were crucial to overcoming vaccine hesitancy and fatigue. He noted that UNICEF had made contributions from core resources towards integrated or basic services in areas at a high risk for polio in Afghanistan

and Pakistan and that, in the new global polio strategy, polio eradication efforts integrated with routine immunization figured more prominently than before.

223. A delegation commended the references to gender in the presentation, noting the urgent need to involve women and girls as agents of change, including women in leadership positions.

224. A delegation expressed concern about wild polio transmission in the remaining endemic countries, as well as the expanding circulation of vaccine-derived polio outbreaks in three World Health Organization (WHO) regions, notably Africa, where WHO staff reductions had been proposed. The delegation said that WHO and UNICEF shared responsibility and accountability for achieving and sustaining a polio-free world.

225. The Executive Director discussed the extraordinary progress the world had made in overcoming polio vaccine hesitancy since the 1950s, citing the need for such efforts to continue. She stated that, in addition to the Gates Foundation, strong partners of UNICEF in polio eradication included Rotary International, WHO, Gavi, the Vaccines Alliance and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

### **C. Annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action**

226. The Director of Emergency Programmes, presented the annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action ([E/ICEF/2021/13](#)).

227. A delegation commended the organization's focus on gender equity and gender-based violence in all stages of humanitarian action and noted that coordination with other United Nations entities was more necessary than ever to meet the needs of all children affected by hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

228. A delegation acknowledged the UNICEF commitment to including people with disabilities in humanitarian action and welcomed its support of 1,200 children with disabilities at UNICEF-supported learning centres in 2020. Given that this number represented a small percentage of the total population, however, the delegation urged UNICEF to redouble its efforts with partners to remove barriers to attendance and learning for boys and girls with disabilities.

229. A delegation asked UNICEF to address the report's omission of its work to address the impacts of the pandemic on children who had lost parents or caregivers. The Director, Emergency Programmes, responded that the child-protection response to COVID-19 had been addressed more specifically in an earlier report, but noted the need to provide updates more regularly.

230. Several delegations suggested that lessons learned from the UNICEF COVID response should serve as a guide to improve future responses in the context of an increasing humanitarian workload, including the implementation of fast recruitment, surge mechanisms, remote programming and rapid assessments. They also encouraged UNICEF to improve inter-agency coordination in emergency responses.

231. A delegation expressed appreciation for the critical role of UNICEF for the COVAX Facility in vaccine procurement, noting the organization's opportunity to strengthen routine immunization systems as the backbone of primary health care and its COVID-19 response.

232. A group of delegations acknowledged that predictable, flexible funding was critical for both long-term planning and the ability to act swiftly in response to increasing needs. A delegation encouraged UNICEF to ensure the adequacy of human resources and capacity-building and encouraged the organization to improve cluster

coordination and cooperation with international stakeholders by collecting and analysing data, developing metrics for appropriate transitions from humanitarian to development assistance and establishing feedback mechanisms in all operations.

233. Several delegations highlighted the need for contextualized, dynamic, comprehensive and gender-responsive risk assessments, stating that in-depth conflict analysis went hand in hand with the UNICEF commitment to strengthening its contributions to building and sustaining peace.

234. Several delegations recognized that UNICEF had led by example, noting the increase in the number of local partners during the COVID-19 response. They pointed to the importance of strengthening the capacities of local partners, particularly women-led organizations, and addressing humanitarian needs in a manner that contributed to reducing future needs.

235. The group of delegations noted that the new Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, the publication entitled “Strengthening UNICEF’s humanitarian action: the humanitarian review: findings and recommendations” and a range of valuable evaluations, most recently the formative evaluation of UNICEF work to link humanitarian and development programming and the global evaluation of UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene programming in protracted crises, 2014–2019, provided sound bases for continuous improvement.

236. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/7 (see annex I).

#### **D. Annual report on the implementation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021**

237. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, introduced the annual report on the implementation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021 (E/ICEF/2021/15), followed by the Principal Adviser, Gender Equality, Programme Division, who presented the report.

238. A group of delegations commended the overall progress reflected in the report, especially in the context of the challenges posed by the pandemic, and they commended UNICEF for meeting 88 per cent of benchmarks under the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. They welcomed the UNICEF efforts to accelerate actions and outcomes in the last year of the current Strategic Plan, emphasizing that it was necessary to implement gender-transformative approaches and address intersecting forms of discrimination to ensure a sustainable recovery from the pandemic. The group of delegations expressed interest in following UNICEF progress on strengthening its approach to addressing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including the consideration of the rights and empowerment of LGBTI children and youth. The group also expressed its appreciation for the continued support of UNICEF for advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights. A delegation noted its concern about the use of such non-agreed terms as “sexual and reproductive health and rights”.

239. The group of delegations encouraged UNICEF to continue to invest in partnerships, including with grass-roots women’s rights organizations, and welcomed its continued efforts to strengthen the evidence base for gender-informed policy and programming in support of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The Principal Adviser, Gender Equality, acknowledged that UNICEF considered gender priorities in its allocation of resources at all levels, so that even as emergency interventions were rolled out in response to COVID-19, such issues as girls’ education and learning, gender-based violence and maternal health remained in sharp focus.

240. A delegation praised UNICEF for achieving positive results on gender equality in the context of the pandemic, which had exacerbated the challenges faced by girls and women in education, health and employment. The delegation added that gender inequality due to imbalance or inadequate development was still widespread globally and that UNICEF should strengthen its gender capacity. The Principal Adviser, Gender Equality, credited the programmatic staff of UNICEF for the results achieved in difficult circumstances during the previous year. She said the results framework of the new Strategic Plan was expected to expand the organization's focus on not only formal education, but also on girls' skills and the transition to employment.

241. A delegation encouraged UNICEF to consider the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women who served as caregivers and front-line workers in the formal and informal health sectors. The delegation expressed appreciation for the increasing investment of UNICEF in gender equality priorities, noting that the pandemic had increased the vulnerability of women and girls to gender-based violence and negative coping mechanisms, such as child marriage, and requested UNICEF to scale up the analysis and reporting of data, disaggregated by sex and age, to strengthen its programmes. The Principal Adviser, Gender Equality, said that UNICEF was rolling out plans to support national capacity to increase disaggregated data and reporting.

242. The delegation welcomed the organization's collaboration with other United Nations entities, including the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Generation Equality Forum

## **E. UNICEF programme cooperation**

### **(a) Country programme documents**

243. The Chair welcomed the panellists for the discussion on the draft CPD for Argentina (E/ICEF/2021/P/L.15): the Sustainable Business and Corporate Ethics Director, Telefónica Hispam and Fundación Telefónica Movistar, Argentina, Ms. Agustina Catone, and the Resident Coordinator, Argentina.

244. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, introduced a video, which highlighted the five priorities established by UNICEF Argentina: poverty reduction, early childhood development, equal opportunities for adolescents, violence-free environments and a society committed to children and adolescents. Following the video presentation, the Regional Director for Latin America and Caribbean presented the CPD.

245. The Resident Coordinator affirmed that the CPD was aligned with the priorities of the UNSDCF for 2022–2025 and noted that, in spite of the country's ample human and natural resources, persistent social and economic inequalities and challenges negatively affected children and youth. The focus of the country programme on mobilizing key alliances and financial resources would help Argentina to address such challenges, while aiding its efforts to fulfil the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and protect children's rights.

246. The Sustainable Business and Corporate Ethics Director highlighted the ways in which COVID-19 had accelerated the need for digital transformation and inclusion, which she said was the basis for Telefónica's ongoing collaboration with UNICEF Argentina.

247. The Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations said that the CPD confirmed a shared vision on the need for multilateral work to address development challenges for children and adolescents in the priority areas identified by Argentina and UNICEF.

248. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/8 (see annex I).



**(b) Extensions of ongoing country programmes**

249. The Chair stated that in accordance with Executive Board decision 2009/11, the Board would be informed of the extensions of ongoing country programmes as set out in document [E/ICEF/2021/P/L.14](#). These included a three-month extension of the country programme for Armenia, following a two-month extension and a four-month extension, and a six-month extension of the country programme for Malaysia, following a two-month extension and a four-month extension, all of which had been approved by the Executive Director.

250. The Executive Board was asked to approve a three-month extension of the country programme for Madagascar, following a one-year extension and a six-month extension; and an eight-month extension of the country programme for the Syrian Arab Republic, following two consecutive one-year extensions, a nine-month extension, a three-month extension, a two-month extension and a four-month extension.

251. The Board adopted decision 2021/9 (see annex I).

**F. Evaluation reports and management responses**

**Annual report for 2020 on the evaluation function in UNICEF, and management response**

252. The Chief, Evaluation Office, presented the annual report for 2020 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2021/18](#)), followed by the Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, who presented the management response ([E/ICEF/2021/19](#)).

253. A group of delegations commended the Evaluation Office on its excellent performance in a highly challenging year, which saw a record number of evaluations and evaluative products and an increase in evaluation coverage; this was testimony to ability of UNICEF to swiftly adapt and innovate when faced with rapidly changing needs.

254. The group of delegations acknowledged the role of recently recruited multi-country specialists at the field level in strengthening the evaluation capacities. However, the group expressed concern that expenditure for evaluation remained below the established target of 1 per cent of programme expenditure. The group reiterated their expectation that adequate funding of the evaluation function would be provided under the new Strategic Plan. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, affirmed that UNICEF expected to achieve the 1 per cent target during the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan period.

255. The group of delegations encouraged UNICEF to expand the use of rigorous impact evaluations, particularly in thematic areas in which new approaches had the potential for scale-up, as well as to address disability issues more systematically, notably in humanitarian evaluations. The group also urged UNICEF to accelerate evaluation coverage of humanitarian action to more adequately reflect spending in that area. In addition, they sought the inclusion of more information throughout all evaluations on the ways in which UNICEF was addressing gender and on UNICEF engagement with other United Nations development system entities to share evaluation knowledge.

256. The Chief, Evaluation Office, noted the establishment of the Global Development Commons, which enabled United Nations entities and external partners to share a body of evaluative evidence. He also described specific actions taken to ensure that gender equality was fully reflected in all evaluations.

257. A delegation asked UNICEF to explain the reasons behind the reduction in allocations from the Evaluation Pooled Fund. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, explained that, since the Fund had been established after the approval of the UNICEF integrated budget, 2018–2021, it had received no direct regular resources allocation. Therefore UNICEF had channelled to the Fund a significant portion of budget savings derived through annual efficiencies. She affirmed that the allocation for 2021 was sufficient to fund the evaluation posts created in 2018 and noted the expectation that the new integrated budget would include a budget line for the Fund.

**Global evaluation of UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene programming in protracted crises, 2014–2019, and management response**

258. The Chief, Evaluation Office, presented the global evaluation of UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene programming in protracted crises, 2014–2019 ([E/ICEF/2021/20](#)), followed by the Associate Director for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), who presented the management response ([E/ICEF/2021/21](#)).

259. A group of delegations called for coordinated and consistent international cooperation to strengthen programmes dedicated to water and sanitation and recognized UNICEF as a global leader in the sector. The group underscored the need to strengthen the link between humanitarian action and development programming to ensure the sustainability of water and sanitation interventions.

260. The group of delegations reinforced the idea that multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary approaches were critical for promoting integrated water resource management processes and accelerating progress. They urged UNICEF country offices to demonstrate that they were adjusting to current contexts, conflicts and risk analyses across silos.

261. The group of delegations noted the need to accelerate progress on WASH in schools and to improve menstrual hygiene management, and expressed concern about the lack of recommendations to ensure that WASH interventions were gender-responsive. They encouraged UNICEF to focus on ensuring safe access to WASH services and improving services for persons living with disabilities and in vulnerable situations. A delegation encouraged UNICEF to continue to strengthen its focus on Sustainable Development Goal target 6.1, safe and affordable drinking water, and to prioritize vulnerable groups, especially women and girls.

262. A delegation called for involving vulnerable groups in the design, delivery and usability of services. The delegation expressed concern about the insufficient investment in staffing and the lack of evidence that UNICEF WASH-supported interventions ensured the safety of users. The delegation looked forward to a greater emphasis on the outcomes of WASH programming in protracted crises.

263. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/10 (see annex I).

**G. Report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2020, and management response**

264. The Director, Ethics Office, presented the report ([E/ICEF/2021/16](#)), followed by the Director ad interim, Division of Human Resources, who presented the management response ([E/ICEF/2021/17](#)).

265. A delegation expressed appreciation for the cooperation of the Ethics Office in providing data regarding whistle-blower protection, ethics training and oversight and travel policies, and welcomed the changes within the Office since the previous annual session, including the establishment of the Office as an independent unit and the appointment of the new Director. The delegation emphasized the importance of the

Ethics Office's work and underlined the need for adequate resources to ensure its effectiveness.

266. The delegation strongly supported the Office's heightened focus on the preventive aspect of ethics oversight, agreeing that this approach played a vital role in preventing and mitigating misconduct as well as organizational harm. At the same time, the delegation highlighted barriers, such as the fact that the ethics and whistle-blower policies and the ethics hotline were not easily accessible through the UNICEF website, and asked for assurance that these issues would be addressed. The Director, Ethics Office, said that, historically, the Office had been principally internal-facing, because it dealt primarily with staff issues, but it had recently worked with the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations to create an external-facing reporting portal for external whistle-blowers, witnesses and stakeholders, the accessibility of which needed further improvement.

267. A delegation expressed appreciation for the Office's important contributions to processes aimed at improving UNICEF workplace culture and to the Internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination. Following up on questions in connection with the Global Staff Survey results, the delegation asked the Ethics Office to provide more information on the interpretation of the results and where the Office saw the need for immediate action. Noting the weak results with regard to staff confidence on being protected from retaliation when reporting misconduct, the delegation questioned whether the current whistle-blower policy and the actions taken in response to the recommendations of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority were sufficient to address this issue. The delegation asked the Ethics Office and UNICEF management what could be done to further increase staff confidence in being protected from retaliation and to foster a speak-up and listen-up culture within the organization. The Director, Ethics Office, said that the Office was increasingly handling retaliation concerns in a proactive and preventive manner. In addition, he noted that the Office was focused on promoting not only a speak-up culture among staff, but a listen-up culture among management, which was necessary for staff to feel protected in reporting. Further, he said that the whistle-blower policy was periodically reviewed and that an update was expected in the near to medium term, particularly in the context of the reports of the Internal Task Force and the Internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination.

268. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/11 (see annex I).

## **H. UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations 2020 annual report to the Executive Board, and management response**

### **UNICEF Audit Advisory Committee 2020 annual report to the Executive Board**

269. The Director, Office of Internal Audit and Investigations, presented the report ([E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.3](#)), which was accompanied by an addendum ([E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.3/Add.1](#)) detailing the investigation cases closed in 2020. The Deputy Director, Division of Financial and Administrative Management, then presented the management response ([E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.4](#)), followed by the Vice-Chair of the Audit Advisory Committee, who discussed the results of the Committee's 2020 annual report.

270. A group of delegations congratulated UNICEF on the Office's overall assurance opinion and commended the Office for its rapid adaptation to the COVID-19 context. The group encouraged the Office to continue to explore innovative solutions for remote audits and investigations without compromising the quality of its work. UNICEF should prioritize the most recurrent audit issues at the country level, such as

the need for improved alignment of the results chain. The group also underlined recommendations to promote the sustainability of interventions.

271. Several delegations took note of the internal audit recommendation on strengthening policies and practices to both prevent and follow up on cases of fraud and sexual harassment, and they encouraged UNICEF to prioritize this work. While they were pleased that UNICEF used the United Nations ClearCheck database when hiring, they asked for clarification as to whether sexual harassment and abuse cases were reported to the database. The Deputy Director, Division of Financial and Administrative Management, affirmed that UNICEF reported cases to the database and also noted that it received requests from other United Nations agencies to clear potential recruitments.

272. A group of delegations welcomed the steps that UNICEF had taken since 2019 to enhance accountability and complementarities and to build on opportunities created by the United Nations reform process. They noted, in particular, the recommendation to enhance engagement and collaboration with partners, including non-governmental organizations, and expressed interest in receiving regular updates about strengthening the UNICEF partnership strategy as well as on the roll-out of eTools.

273. Several delegations expressed support for the recommendation to strengthen evaluations by allocating adequate financial resources and capacities as well as for the establishment of the Evaluation Pooled Fund. They encouraged more inter-agency evaluations, not only to share resources, but to look at outcomes within a partnership approach.

274. Several delegations welcomed the establishment of the Donor Reporting Portal, noting its increased efficiency in creating donor reports, both within UNICEF and for partners. In addition, delegations welcomed the internal audit of the harmonized approach to cash transfers (HACT) at UNICEF and its management response as well as the announced improvements to HACT. They also welcomed UNICEF efforts, in the context of the pandemic, to increase digital solutions for remote monitoring and to reduce the potential for errors or fraud.

275. A delegation commended the Office for prioritizing cases of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in its investigations. The delegation also requested the Office to update the Executive Board on the implementation and impact of the new investigative structure and the addition of a new unit with both investigative and audit teams in its report for 2021. The Director said the Office stood ready to provide such an update.

276. A group of delegations commended UNICEF for its work on community reporting, but found the whistle-blower reporting page on the UNICEF website difficult to find compared with those of sister agencies. The delegations expressed concern that this channel for reporting cases of abuse or harassment was not intuitive, particularly for children and young people. The Director noted that his Office had been working with the Ethics Office to ensure the clarity and accessibility of reporting channels and noted that the revision of the internal and external reporting websites was being prioritized and would include translation into all official languages of the United Nations.

277. Numerous delegations expressed concern about the increase in actions pending implementation for more than 18 months and called on the Office and UNICEF management to work together to act upon those recommendations more promptly. The Director, Office of Internal Audit and Investigations, noted that it had recently launched a website to provide greater transparency for agreed actions, available to all staff.

278. A delegation expressed its endorsement of the revised Charter of the Office of Internal Audit and Investigations. The Director said that the Charter would provide a critical foundation for the future expansion of the Office's work, including its advisory services and a renewed emphasis on its investigative function on the matters of greatest risk to UNICEF.

279. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/12 (see annex I).

**I. Update on the implementation of the recommendations made in the independent panel review of the UNICEF response to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and the report of the Independent Task Force on Workplace Gender-Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Harassment and Abuse of Authority**

280. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, introduced the update (E/ICEF/2021/14), followed by the Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture, and the Senior Adviser, Child Safeguarding, who presented an overview.

281. A group of delegations thanked UNICEF for its commitment to a safe working environment and for tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. The group highlighted actions perceived as critical to this work, including progress on the personal empowerment of staff and increased employee engagement, and expressed interest in receiving more-detailed information on staff survey findings and improving the speak-up culture. The Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture, said that fostering a speak-up culture and building psychological safety and trust were major themes across all offices. In addition to conducting workshops, UNICEF was encouraging more diverse representation in management teams and promoting various confidential and anonymous forums for staff to share their views safely.

282. The group of delegations urged UNICEF to maintain robust processes to prevent, mitigate and respond to sexual abuse and exploitation and sexual harassment issues, engaging with all partners and stakeholders. The group welcomed the expanded community reporting mechanisms and continued engagement at the country level. The group also welcomed the leading system-wide role of UNICEF to improve inter-agency collaboration and coordination and requested an update on the UNICEF roll-out of the implementing partner capacity assessment and toolkit and its integration in the United Nations Partner Portal. The group also asked for an update on progress made by UNICEF in implementing the United Nations protocol on the provision of assistance to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

283. The Senior Adviser, Child Safeguarding, noted that the toolkit and partner assessment roll-out had reached 65 per cent of partners, which had been assessed on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse; UNICEF was accepting the results of the assessments of partners by other United Nations entities on an ongoing basis. With respect to victim assistance, the Senior Adviser described the UNICEF collaboration with the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate and the organization's leadership on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee protection from sexual exploitation and abuse dashboard as well as on an inter-agency technical note and training package on the victim assistance protocol, which was geared towards humanitarian country teams, United Nations country teams and networks focused on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

284. A group of delegations expressed appreciation for the activities undertaken by the Internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination and welcomed the adoption of the plan of action, considering it a crucial tool to promote racial equity throughout the organization, especially for Africans and people of African descent. The group requested an update on the work of the Task Team and asked UNICEF to

elaborate on the action plan, namely its scope and timeline and whether staff were consulted. The Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture, responded that staff had been consulted through multiple channels, with the engagement of 8,000 employees across the organization. She noted that the Task Team's recommendations had been submitted to the Executive Director in May 2021, and that UNICEF was currently working on its response.

285. A delegation, in reference to the upcoming report on UNICEF work to address anti-racism and discrimination, said that zero-tolerance on sexual harassment and abuse and exploitation should be observed by all, but emphasized that it was not acceptable for non-agreed terminology to be used by UNICEF in its reports, specifically "sexual orientation and gender identity" as well as "LGBTIQ+ communities".

286. While commending the progress made to date, the group of delegations remained concerned that racial bias and insufficient progress in achieving a speak-up and listen-up culture prevented the reporting of possible cases of racism.

287. A delegation noted that recent allegations from the Democratic Republic of the Congo had shown that collective action was vital to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and ensuring accountability across the aid sector. While UNICEF had made progress, more needed to be done to address the underlying drivers of sexual exploitation and abuse, including gender inequality and discrimination and gender-based violence.

**J. Update on the implementation of General Assembly resolution [72/279](#) on the repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system**

288. The Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, introduced the update, which was presented by the Director, Public Partnerships Division.

289. A delegation noted that the roll-out of the new United Nations resident coordinator system was an important step towards increasing the coordination of the United Nations development system entities towards achieving a common mission, with a focus not only on effectiveness, efficiency and results, but also on greater transparency and accountability. The delegation encouraged UNICEF to put forward candidates with strong humanitarian backgrounds to strengthen and diversify the resident coordinator pool. The delegation acknowledged the UNICEF contributions to the fine-tuning of the management accountability framework and the resident coordinator performance appraisal feedback mechanism, and encouraged UNICEF to continue to update the Member States on this work.

290. A delegation noted with satisfaction the active support of UNICEF to the United Nations development system reform and for strengthening social protection and services within the framework of the socioeconomic COVID-19 response. The delegation was encouraged by the organization's adherence to the new cooperation framework as a central instrument for planning and developing new CPDs. Emphasizing the importance of regional perspectives as a bridge between the national and global levels, the delegation asked UNICEF to describe any upcoming actions to strengthen regional collaboration and how these were being coordinated with other agencies. The Director, Public Partnerships Division, said that the UNICEF regional offices actively supported the repositioning and were engaged in all regional collaborative platforms, 30 issue-based coalitions and all peer support groups.

291. A delegation expressed appreciation for the leading role that UNICEF had taken to advance inter-agency collaboration and coordination in several thematic areas, including improving policies and mechanisms to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse.

292. Several delegations expressed interest in how UNICEF would ensure that the new Strategic Plan was aligned with those of the other funds and programmes to increase complementarity and avoid overlap, as well as how the QCPR monitoring framework would be aligned with the results framework of the new UNICEF Strategic Plan.

293. Noting that the success of the United Nations development system reform depended largely upon country-level leadership, a delegation expressed interest in learning how UNICEF was broadening support for change in cooperation with other United Nations entities. The Director, Public Partnerships Division, said that UNICEF kept colleagues across the organization fully informed of United Nations reform developments, such as the management accountability framework negotiations and the regional and multi-country office reviews, and that senior management engaged in inclusive dialogues with staff on the implementation of QCPR mandates.

294. Referencing the new Strategic Plan's emphasis on working together as one United Nations, a delegation asked UNICEF about the strategic shifts required to coordinate with sister agencies and the ways in which they had been integrated into the Plan. The delegation welcomed the positive steps that UNICEF had taken to advance strategic partnerships with sister agencies, particularly at the field level, and asked how such partnerships were being monitored. The Director, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, said the new UNICEF Strategic Plan was being aligned around common results with the strategies of the other funds and programmes. She noted that the QCPR monitoring framework was still being drafted and that senior colleagues from UNICEF were part of the technical working group in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

295. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/13 (see annex I).

## **K. Update on the World Bank instrument to facilitate sustained investment in private sector fundraising**

296. Following an introduction by the Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, the Comptroller and Director, Division of Financial and Administrative Management, and the Director, Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division, presented the update.

297. A delegation acknowledged that declining voluntary contributions to regular resources had resulted in a budget shortfall, which UNICEF had addressed by entering into a financial arrangement with the World Bank for a pilot financial instrument of \$50 million to be repaid over five years. The delegation commended the risk analysis included in the update, but said that it should have included details on the loan balance and the projected timeline for full repayment. The Comptroller noted that the instrument was structured in such a way that repayment of principal started only at the end of the third year, before which the only repayment was interest.

298. While expressing appreciation for the in-depth consultations on the World Bank instrument, a delegation requested further clarification on the financial risk to UNICEF as well as the opinion of the Office of Legal Affairs on the instrument. The Comptroller stated that the risk matrix for the instrument was based on past income flow and donations, which the World Bank and UNICEF had analysed to assess the organization's ability to repay. Based on that credible information and history they had determined that those sources would be sufficient for repayment, even on the basis of conservative projections. The Director, Private Fundraising and Partnerships

Division, confirmed this analysis on the basis of the latest available figures for private sector fundraising. The Comptroller further clarified that the opinion of the Office of Legal Affairs implied that Executive Board approval of the instrument as a pilot project was sufficient for that purpose, but if it were to become normal business for UNICEF to enter into such instruments, it would require approval by the General Assembly and an amendment to the UNICEF Financial Regulations and Rules by the Executive Board.

299. A delegation stated that, while the new instrument was approved as a pilot project in consultation with the Executive Board, the hope was that it would be a successful model that could be used by other agencies and the United Nations as a whole. The Executive Director said that early indications of the success of the financing instrument were strong and agreed that it could be useful for other agencies.

## **L. Address by the Chairperson of the UNICEF Global Staff Association**

300. The Chairperson announced that the Global Staff Association was working on re-engineering staff engagement processes to acknowledge the value of tapping into internal resources and talent and generating more robust results for children. He also reported that the Association was partnering with senior management to monitor progress on the implementation of the agreed recommendations of the Internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination to champion an inclusive, respectful, fair and equitable workplace.

301. The Association had continued to work with management to ensure a conducive work environment for staff and to see that the interests of staff were considered in office processes, including recruitment, career development, mobility and rotation, performance management and duty of care.

302. The Chairperson recognized that COVID-19 had placed many staff members in challenging situations, where they had had to operate beyond the borders of normalcy, and yet they had remained dedicated to their work.

303. Regarding the UNICEF commitment to culture change, the Chairperson cited implementation challenges, not the least of which were colleagues' fear of retaliation. He said that the Association would partner with the appropriate UNICEF offices to ensure that all barriers were removed, desired behaviours were promoted and support structures were accessible.

304. On behalf of the Global Staff Association, the Chairperson requested support for its call to the International Civil Service Commission to review the way in which compensation for national staff was determined, reiterating that the UNICEF pool of internal talent was ready to take on new responsibilities and adapt to emerging areas of work.

305. A group of delegations thanked the Association's leadership and the UNICEF staff members for their dedicated and relentless efforts and expressed sorrow for those who had lost their lives. The group acknowledged that COVID-19 had placed an additional burden on UNICEF staff members and commended them for coping with those stresses. They credited the UNICEF staff in the field with helping to draft a Strategic Plan that recognized humanity's existential challenges and the need to address them effectively and jointly through accelerated, catalytic action.

306. The group of delegations commended the involvement of UNICEF staff members in the current initiatives to improve organizational culture, fight discrimination and racism and prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, and expressed appreciation for the ongoing dialogue with staff.



## **M. Other matters**

### **Provisional list of agenda items for the second regular session of 2021**

307. The provisional list of agenda items for the second regular session of the UNICEF Executive Board in 2021 was presented by the Secretary of the Executive Board. Two updates were highlighted: (a) the removal of the report of the joint field visit of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme/the United Nations Population Fund/the United Nations Office for Project Services, UNICEF, UN-Women and the World Food Programme; and (b) the consideration of the final plan for global evaluations, 2022–2025 at the first regular session in 2022; the draft for review would be considered at the second regular session in 2021.

## **N. Adoption of draft decisions**

308. The Executive Board adopted decisions 2021/6 through 2021/13 (see annex I).

## **O. UNICEF Staff Team Awards and closing statements by the Executive Director of UNICEF and the President of the Executive Board**

309. The Executive Director announced the winners of the 2021 UNICEF Staff Team Awards, which went to 10 teams that achieved extraordinary results in the most challenging of circumstances. The awards went to: (a) Supply Division, for its COVID-19 procurement and delivery response; (b) the Lebanon Country Office, for its Beirut blast response; (c) the country offices in Bangladesh, Chad, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Mali, Nepal and Niger; the West and Central Africa Regional Office; and the Division of Communication and the Child Protection section at headquarters for their collaboration to amplify the voices of the most vulnerable girls; (d) the Brazil Country Office, for keeping education alive for youth at risk; (e) the Pakistan Country Office, for having pivoted its polio programme to support the COVID-19 response; (f) the Indonesia Country Office, for the scale and scope of its pandemic response; (g) the Public Partnerships Division, for its COVID-19 resource mobilization and advocacy; (h) the Timor-Leste Country Office, for its Distance Learning Initiative; (i) the Senegal Country Office, for its Scaling Pneumonia Response Innovations initiative; and (j) the China Country Office, for its COVID-19 response efforts.

310. In her closing statement, the Executive Director said that the new UNICEF Strategic Plan would strengthen the organization's focus in key areas, including weaving gender into all programming in a more deliberate way; reducing climate and environmental risks; and applying lessons from the WASH evaluation to strengthen programmes.

311. The Executive Director also underscored the importance of strong vaccination networks, not only around procurement, delivery and administration, but also in terms of community acceptance. She assured the Executive Board that UNICEF would apply the lessons learned from COVID-19 in this regard.

312. The Executive Director expressed pride in the ongoing contributions of UNICEF to the United Nations development system reform as the organization worked with all entities to make the most of their comparative advantages and ultimately achieve results for children and young people. She said that such collaboration extended to the three flagship areas of the United Nations-wide collaboration mentioned in her opening statement: education, water and nutrition.

313. The Executive Director highlighted the new approaches to partnerships that the organization was forging with the private sector and international financial institutions to mobilize more funding for UNICEF work. She renewed the call for more flexible regular resources and appealed to the Member States to respond whenever and wherever the needs were greatest.

314. The Executive Director noted that UNICEF was streamlining its work to achieve better results and to help staff members do their jobs more efficiently, providing them with opportunities to gain the necessary training and skills.

315. The Executive Director expressed appreciation for the Executive Board's ideas and insights as UNICEF continued to strengthen its organizational culture, including through its efforts to end abuse of authority, sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, and to implement the recommendations of the Internal Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination.

316. The Executive Director announced that UNICEF had welcomed several senior colleagues to new posts across the organization. She expressed appreciation to the technical staff and the interpreters for their work at the annual session. She concluded by thanking the President, the Bureau and the Executive Board members for helping UNICEF to achieve the outcomes of the previous extraordinary year.

317. The President of the Executive Board thanked the participants in the annual session for their efforts, noting that he was encouraged by the discussions of the ways in which UNICEF and its partners had responded to the COVID-19 crisis. He said that UNICEF staff had mitigated the suffering of millions of children and their families worldwide, providing inspiration for ongoing efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

318. The President expressed pride in the leading role of UNICEF in the COVAX Facility and urged the Executive Board and other Member States to continue to support the Facility with both funding and innovative strategies to accelerate the procurement and distribution of vaccines.

319. The President said that the draft UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 had benefited from broad input and lessons learned during the implementation of the previous Strategic Plan and the COVID-19 response. He expressed confidence that the new framework, once finalized, would effectively guide UNICEF work to leave no child behind.

320. Noting that it was his first Executive Board session as President, he closed by thanking his fellow Bureau members, the Board members and all the delegations, experts and technical staff as well as the Executive Director and the Secretary of the Executive Board. He expressed his hope that great strides would be made towards ending the pandemic by the time the Board met again in September.

**Part three**  
**Second regular session 2021**

**Held at United Nations Headquarters from  
7 to 10 September 2021**

## **I. Organization of the session**

### **A. Adoption of the provisional annotated agenda, timetable and organization of work**

321. The Executive Board adopted the agenda, timetable and organization of work (E/ICEF/2021/23) for the session.

322. The Secretary of the Executive Board announced that 35 observer delegations, including 1 intergovernmental organization, 5 non-governmental organizations and 6 National Committees for UNICEF had submitted credentials, in accordance with rule 50.2 of the rules of procedure.

### **B. Opening statements by the President of the Executive Board and the Executive Director of UNICEF**

323. The President said that 2021 had been a challenging year. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic had fuelled an enormous humanitarian crisis and caused tragic setbacks in progress for children. However, the year had also brought opportunities for innovation, new approaches to working and a better understanding of best practices in such areas as remote learning for children and adolescents. The protracted crisis had also reinforced the importance of linking humanitarian and development programming so that humanitarian responses flowed into sustainable progress once the crisis had passed.

324. The President noted that the pandemic had made the delivery of services to children exponentially more difficult. He commended UNICEF for persevering and for continuing to raise awareness of the unique, pressing needs of children and of their rights.

325. The President highlighted the importance of the role that UNICEF played as an advocate for children, especially during humanitarian crises, because it was during such crises that those left farthest behind were children.

326. The President noted that lessons learned from the programme work carried on during the pandemic had informed the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, which would be considered for endorsement at the session. The formative evaluation of UNICEF work to link humanitarian and development programming, whose findings and recommendations would be considered at the session, had also contributed positively to the Plan.

327. The President said that the Strategic Plan promised to be an effective and agile framework capable of guiding UNICEF as it worked to achieve the outcome-level results needed to fulfil the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. He expressed his gratitude to the Executive Director of UNICEF and her team for a very consultative process and to the Member States, which had contributed so constructively during the series of workshops and briefings. The consultations, which had brought to the fore diverse national priorities, had guided UNICEF in developing a balanced document capable of embracing that diversity. He trusted that consensus would be reached on a strong endorsement of the Plan, which was so crucial to empowering UNICEF to leave no child behind.

328. The President expressed his satisfaction that the area of children with disabilities had gained new prominence in the Strategic Plan, since they were among the most excluded in policy planning and service delivery. He noted that UNICEF had committed to advancing disability rights as a cross-cutting priority. Referring to the wide-ranging work that UNICEF was already doing in the area, the President highlighted several projects in the region of Eastern Europe. The President noted the

importance for UNICEF of the United Nations human rights framework and of the human rights model of disability enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. He said that children with disabilities need not remain excluded, but that the work to bring about change demanded an embrace of that model. He hoped that more Member States would support the efforts of UNICEF towards helping children with disabilities to reach their full potential, which required their full social inclusion.

329. The President emphasized that girls and women were also too often left behind. Their exclusion robbed the world of fresh ideas and powerful capabilities and their full participation in society was crucial for the achievement of sustainable development. The President noted that the Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025 would be considered at the session.

330. The President said that the thematic presentation of the 12 country programme documents (CPDs) would focus on worsening undernutrition and childhood overweight and obesity.

331. The President highlighted the progress update on the UNICEF experience in high-income countries and in countries transitioning from upper-middle-income to high-income status within the framework of the UNICEF universal agenda for child rights. He emphasized the importance of clarity for UNICEF on the way forward.

332. The President highlighted the presentation of the integrated budget, 2022–2025 and reminded the Member States of the importance of regular resources, whose flexibility enabled UNICEF to put its resources where they were most needed.

333. The President announced that the session was not only his last as President; it was also the last session as Executive Director for Ms. Henrietta H. Fore, as she was stepping down. He said that there would be an opportunity during the session to say farewell.

334. The President commented that one of the most extraordinary aspects of the Executive Board was its commitment to putting children first. He acknowledged the divergent customs, histories and political systems of the Member States and recognized that each held strong viewpoints about what was right for children and young people. He recalled that, in spite of these differences, the Board members always found a way to agreement for the benefit of children. The President expressed confidence that the session would remain solidly within that tradition of mutual understanding and compromise.

335. The Executive Director recalled her first day at UNICEF in January 2018, when the situation for children was already dire, and said that the challenges had only escalated. The world was confronted with a child rights emergency in which the pandemic and other crises had combined to deprive children of their right to health and well-being.

336. Economic instability was disrupting essential services and making it harder for families to survive. Many primary and secondary schools remained shuttered and school attendance had been indefinitely postponed for millions of children globally. The number of children involved in child labour had significantly increased. And over the previous year, the worst humanitarian crises for children had intensified.

337. Climate-related disasters had tripled over the previous 30 years, forcing people from their homes and driving food insecurity and water scarcity for millions. Almost half the world's children were living in one of the 33 countries classified as being at extremely high risk for the impacts of climate change. An estimated 36 million children were living in displacement due to conflict, violence and disaster.

338. However, the Executive Director said that she remained hopeful, having seen the tremendous resilience of children as well as the tireless dedication of the UNICEF teams and their partners. The COVID-19 response had shown that the organization was resilient and prepared to shift priorities at a moment's notice on a global scale. UNICEF remained committed to stay and deliver in humanitarian emergencies and also to plant the seeds of development as part of its dual mandate.

339. UNICEF was working to address the global learning crisis through the Reimagine Education, Generation Unlimited and GIGA initiatives; had introduced the first comprehensive index that analysed climate risk from a child's perspective; and was exploring and implementing various innovations. The organization was supporting the campaign to ensure water security for all; expanding its collaboration with international financial institutions, foundations, corporations, Governments and individuals; and deepening its engagement with private sector partners.

340. UNICEF continued to improve internally, strengthening its organizational culture and core values and playing a leading role in the United Nations reform.

341. The Executive Director said that the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 reflected the UNICEF universal mandate to reach all children and featured gender and disability prominently across every aspect of programming. In implementing the plan, UNICEF would continue its longstanding process of agreeing on priorities with national Governments, while consistently speaking out for the rights and well-being of children everywhere. To deliver on the plan's ambitions, however, UNICEF needed the flexible resources critical to its ability to mount efficient, swift responses to emergencies and provide countries with effective support to build their long-term resilience and development.

342. Opening the tribute segment of the session, the President said that it had been a great privilege for him to serve as President of the Board of UNICEF, whose brand recognition was well deserved and one of its most important assets, enabling it to work under different political systems in diverse social contexts and providing a sense of trust for millions of donors and partners worldwide.

343. He said that for almost four years the Executive Director had safeguarded that brand recognition and trust, driving the actions of UNICEF to address the enormous challenges facing children and young people and overseeing multiple and protracted crises. She had spearheaded the critical role of UNICEF in the COVID-19 response, including in the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility; encouraged innovation and transformative solutions; and championed the reimagining of education. She had led UNICEF in cultivating public and private sector partnerships, innovative financing initiatives and a bolder focus on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. She had also led the organization in facing difficult issues, including commissioning independent reports on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and on organizational culture, and always strived to ensure that UNICEF lived up to its ideals. She had embraced the United Nations reform and consistently affirmed the relevance of multilateralism. And she had been a tireless ambassador for the cause of children

344. The President said that the Executive Director's wisdom, grace and warmth would be greatly missed. He wished her well and expressed his hope that she would continue to keep UNICEF close.

345. In a pre-recorded video message, the Secretary-General of the United Nations said that, for 75 years, the world's children had looked to UNICEF for help and hope. Under the Executive Director's leadership, UNICEF had not only stayed and delivered, it had expanded its work in exciting ways, creating new partnerships, stressing local primary healthcare and key services, keeping vaccination campaigns

going, reaching more children with online education and mental health support, getting more girls into the classroom, working to connect every school in the world to the Internet, amplifying the voices of children and young people, and, through the COVAX Facility, contributing to the greatest vaccination drive in history.

346. He highlighted the Executive Director's role in creating the Generation Unlimited partnership; her leadership of efforts to end the scourge of sexual abuse and exploitation; and her tireless advocacy for the United Nations reform. He said that she was leaving UNICEF a more respectful and inclusive place, one that was ready for the next 75 years of service to children. He called her dedication to children's futures inspirational and thanked her for her vision, ideas, advice and energy, and for her service to UNICEF and to the world's children.

347. In their national statements, the delegations offered tributes to the Executive Director, expressing their warm appreciation and admiration for her exemplary leadership of UNICEF. They expressed gratitude for her dedication to the cause of promoting and protecting the rights of children and for her outstanding work to address the extraordinary challenges facing children and young people.

348. Delegations called UNICEF a key partner under the Executive Director's leadership in battling the pandemic worldwide, especially through the COVAX Facility, and for staying and delivering in the world's most difficult and volatile settings. A delegation expressed appreciation for her focus on innovation, proactivity and partnerships, which had enabled UNICEF to continue programme delivery under the challenging conditions of the pandemic and helped it to limit harmful risks to children, protect its human and financial resources, foster greater transparency and accountability and scale up the distribution of school materials and health equipment for children around the world.

349. A delegation appreciated that under the Executive Director's leadership the organization had mounted several major humanitarian campaigns to alleviate the suffering of children, refugees and internally displaced populations in places stricken by poverty, conflict and natural disasters. A group of delegations acknowledged the swift and agile response of the organization to the ongoing situation in Afghanistan as well as the Executive Director's advocacy for women's and girls' right to education and to be part of society on equal terms with boys and men. The group of delegations expressed its gratitude for the broader work that she had accomplished on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. They called her a role model for girls and women across the globe and a shining example of what they could accomplish, if given the chance.

350. Delegations expressed appreciation for the Executive Director's contributions to implementing a zero-tolerance policy regarding sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, both within UNICEF and for the children the organization served, and enabling the improvement of relevant policies and practices. The Chairperson of the UNICEF Global Staff Association praised her for boldly taking the organization on a journey of self-discovery, scrutiny and reorientation towards the values that made it an enviable brand, including the recent focus on racism and discrimination.

351. A delegation expressed appreciation that during the Executive Director's tenure UNICEF had achieved most of the objectives of the Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 to promote survival, nutrition, health, education, protection and life opportunities for children.

352. A group of delegations called UNICEF a key partner not only to Member States, but also to the United Nations system, having achieved a broader range of public and private partnerships under the Executive Director's guidance. They called her a true leader in championing children's rights worldwide and coordinating joint efforts and

commended her commitment to the United Nations reform and to ensuring that it manifested itself where it really mattered: at the country level, close to those being served.

353. The group of delegations highlighted that the Executive Director had enabled UNICEF to develop new funding mechanisms and had bolstered the finances of the organization for the benefit of the world's children; she had also consistently underscored the importance of flexible funds.

354. Thanking the Executive Director for her dedication, a delegation said that one could not hope for a better purpose in life than to stand for millions of children who faced the brunt of violence, famine, poverty and inequality. The delegations expressed their appreciation for having had the opportunity to work with her and said that she would be greatly missed. They wished her well in the future.

355. A delegation thanked the President for his able leadership of the Executive Board and assured him of his delegation's support towards successful deliberations.

356. Several delegations, highlighting the inequalities foregrounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, said that the work of UNICEF was more important than ever. They noted the pandemic's broad impact on children, especially girls, including poverty, malnutrition, domestic and gender-based violence, early marriage, child labour, and exploitation, including trafficking. Delegations cited the growing digital divide, which had led to widely unequal access to education during the pandemic, noting the enormous number of children still out of school. A delegation urged an intersectional approach to inequality and discrimination to bring about efficient, transformative policies on the ground.

357. Delegations called for increased efforts to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine in developing and vulnerable countries. The International Inequality Policy and Advocacy Lead for Oxfam and Chair of the People's Vaccine Alliance urged UNICEF to support worldwide investment in the global vaccine manufacturing needed to end the pandemic.

358. A delegation highlighted the importance of effective monitoring to ensure the coherent implementation of the UNICEF mandate, while another delegation called for a strengthened evaluation function to better measure impact, contribute to the global evidence base and manage knowledge internally.

359. Delegations highlighted the importance of addressing emerging challenges. A delegation said that, in the context of climate change, climate sensitivity should become standard in programming, and called for increasing the relevant internal capacities. Two delegations highlighted the importance of responding to the challenges of digital media, with one delegation noting that, although essential for education, digital media reduced social interaction, increased mental health problems and exposed children and adolescents to violence, including bullying, hate speech and sexual exploitation and abuse. Delegations also pointed to the promise of such initiatives as GIGA, Generation Unlimited and Reimagine Education and emphasized the need to close the digital divide.

360. A delegation called for continuing attention to the underlying causes of migration as well as forced displacement, xenophobia and discrimination and called for mitigating such harmful practices as the detention of migrant children and the separation of families.

361. Delegations called for the international community to provide the flexible and predictable funding that UNICEF needed to fulfil its mandate. The pandemic had highlighted the necessity of flexible resources for responding quickly to emergencies and providing swift, effective support at the country level. A delegation urged the



Member States to fulfil their funding compact commitments by 2023 of at least 30 per cent of funding to regular resources.

### **C. Proposed programme of work for the Executive Board sessions in 2022**

362. The Secretary of the Executive Board presented for information the proposed programme of work (E/ICEF/2021/24), which had been prepared by the Office of the Secretary in consultation with the Bureau of the Executive Board on the basis of statutory requirements, decision 2020/14 on working methods, requests made in decisions of the Executive Board, and proposals by the secretariat.

363. The Secretary noted that the programme of work was a flexible framework that could be revised throughout the year.

## **II. Deliberations of the Executive Board**

### **A. UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025**

364. The presentation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 (E/ICEF/2021/25) was preceded by a video highlighting the priorities of children and young people around the world, 200,000 of whom had provided their input to UNICEF during the Plan's development. Following an introduction by the Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, the Strategic Plan was presented by the Director of the Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring. Delegations addressed the Strategic Plan in their national statements and during the discussion under agenda item 4.

365. The delegations welcomed the Strategic Plan, with two groups of delegations expressing appreciation for the consultative and transparent development process. A delegation welcomed the focus on the promotion and protection of child welfare, while two delegations recalled the universal mandate of UNICEF to reach all children everywhere.

366. A delegation welcomed the UNICEF intention to engage in transformative partnerships within and beyond the United Nations system and encouraged the organization to continue seeking efficiency gains through common services and joined-up approaches.

367. A delegation welcomed the shift towards a transformative, intersectional approach to inequality and discrimination, notably the addressing of underlying drivers to bring about systemic change, while another delegation welcomed the efforts to address the root causes of child mortality, poverty, vulnerability, sexual exploitation and exclusion. Delegations cited their appreciation for other key areas of focus, including the elevating of gender equality and children with disabilities as cross-cutting priorities; climate; innovation; and resilient health-care systems. A delegation welcomed plans to support evidence-based policies and programmes for inclusive education. Several delegations welcomed the focus on human rights, including the rights of girls and women, with a delegation calling for the prevention of child migration-related detention and family separation. The delegation encouraged UNICEF to ensure access to basic services for migrant children as well as to empower them to reach their full potential.

368. Several delegations expressed appreciation for the integration of humanitarian action throughout the Strategic Plan, given the dual mandate of UNICEF and the increasing volume of its humanitarian operations, with a delegation noting the importance of the mandate to the international community's efforts to respond to and recover from the pandemic and achieve sustainable development results. Several delegations welcomed the risk-informed approach to humanitarian and development

programming, in particular the objective to continue to contribute towards social cohesion and peace. They noted that cross-cutting programming on resilience, peacebuilding and climate action that addressed the root causes of such vulnerabilities as fragility, conflict, displacement and emergencies would help to build stronger local capacities to prevent, prepare for and respond to crises.

369. A delegation appreciated the inclusion of organizational performance enablers, as a healthy working culture would better enable UNICEF to deliver results for children.

370. A group of delegations highlighted the renewed mandate of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR), which called for a strengthened commitment to system reform and coherence, collaboration, efficiency and effectiveness. They commended the strategic plans of the New York-based funds and programmes for providing the framework to translate the mandate into strategic programming and operational activities. The group expressed appreciation for the details on joint engagement and the alignment of contributions to collective results, which would make them measurable. They also appreciated the complementarities reflected in the plans and the integrated results and resources frameworks, which would facilitate the establishment of the new generation of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs). The group noted that the core of the collective results was an understanding of the respective agencies' comparative advantages and mandates as well as the potential synergies, which should be leveraged for coordinated system-wide collaboration and agency-specific contributions to meeting needs on the ground.

371. The group of delegations expected the agencies to report on collective results, particularly on the development of capacities and an enabling environment for long-term, system-wide development results. The midterm reviews would enable stock-taking and the adjustment of partnership modalities and agency-specific contributions to joint engagement.

372. A group of delegations recognized that the Plan, as an agency-owned document, did not capture all the concerns and priorities of the Member States, including those joining the group statement. The group expressed its belief, nonetheless, that it would serve as a global framework to enable UNICEF to fulfil its mandate and support countries in addressing their national development needs and priorities. Affirming their preparedness to support UNICEF in delivering on its mandate, the group of delegations looked forward to adopting a decision endorsing the new Plan.

373. Several delegations highlighted the inclusion of terminology that had not been intergovernmentally agreed, with one delegation suggesting that a decision could be adopted with strong caveats. The delegation added that it saw the potential of UNICEF in health care, education and the social support of children and families.

374. Several delegations emphasized the importance of recognizing national ownership and priorities and adapting the work of UNICEF to different contexts. A group of delegations strongly encouraged UNICEF to work in close cooperation with other United Nations entities to align programming with the country-specific cooperation frameworks, in close consultation with national Governments. A delegation expressed its expectation that UNICEF would continue to consult all stakeholders in the development of CPDs and ensure that they reflected the values of the Charter of the United Nations, including the promotion of respect for human rights. The Executive Director confirmed that UNICEF would base all its programmes on national ownership and would work with every country to ensure that the wording fit its cultural and operational context.

375. Several delegations highlighted the setbacks to progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals caused by the pandemic, with a group of delegations calling for new approaches to overcome obstacles.

376. The Chair of the Standing Group of National Committees for UNICEF highlighted digital transformation as an area in which the National Committees could add value, since they were agile organizations that were close to their supporters and markets. As major contributors to private sector funding and the largest source of unrestricted funds to the organization, the National Committees looked forward to collaborating with UNICEF on an impactful business plan to foster growth and achieve expected results.

377. A delegation enquired as to how the Strategic Plan would be introduced at the country level. The Director noted that the development of the Plan had been substantively informed by bottom-up consultations and analysis, including the aggregated situation analyses and priorities communicated by country offices over the previous year. Over the coming four months, the methodology for implementation would be refined and, informed by national priorities, the baselines, milestones and targets for measuring against the Strategic Plan would be developed. In addition, every country programme, at strategic moments in the programme cycle, would be assessed for alignment with and contribution to the Strategic Plan results and the necessary adjustments made in the development and financing plans for scaled-up outcome results for children.

378. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/14 (see annex I).

## **B. UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025**

379. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, introduced the Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025 (E/ICEF/2021/31). Following a video highlighting the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls and women, the Associate Director, Gender Equality, presented the Plan.

380. A group of delegations commended UNICEF for the well-structured and evidenced-based Plan, recognized the consultative process that had informed it and called for accelerated progress to achieve its targets. The group, along with another delegation, also appreciated the clear steps aimed at incorporating gender equality into the five Goal Areas of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.

381. The group of delegations noted that, considering the pandemic, climate crisis and increasing humanitarian and protracted crises, it would have appreciated a more consistent human rights-based approach; a stronger focus on persons with disabilities; and more emphasis on transformative strategies.

382. The group of delegations and two additional delegations called for more focus on sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health and rights, with one delegation specifying that comprehensive sexuality education should be gender-responsive, age-appropriate and of high quality, in line with the Global AIDS Strategy, 2021–2026, and called for prioritizing adolescent girls and young women and young key populations in high-HIV settings.

383. The group of delegations appreciated the focus on institutional accountability and the plans to specify gender-related results from programme design through implementation and monitoring, while a delegation applauded the specificity of the indicators and monitoring mechanisms.

384. The group of delegations encouraged the use of disaggregated data in planning and reporting and expressed keen interest in the commitment to invest in and advocate

for the mandatory reporting of sex- and age-disaggregated data, including in humanitarian emergencies.

385. The group of delegations appreciated the emphasis on gender-responsive social protection systems, given their importance for alleviating poverty, empowering women and improving children's educational outcomes.

386. A delegation applauded the commitment to helping the most marginalized, including those discriminated against on the basis of disability, race, sexual orientation or gender identity, and encouraged the greater inclusion of youth, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex youth, with another delegation calling for more focus on their protection. A delegation commended UNICEF for continuing to support women, youth and local social-justice organizations in addressing pressing challenges, including sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse; racial injustice; and the climate crisis.

387. A delegation expressed its appreciation for the focus on adolescents and their role as agents of change, noting that the pandemic-related decline in school enrolment and increase in early marriage and pregnancy had impacted their development as well as progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

388. The delegation welcomed the focus on protection from violence against women and at-risk groups, including those with HIV/AIDS, and called for increased efforts to protect early childhood and girls' right to education, as well as to overcome the digital gap.

389. A delegation asked how UNICEF would ensure sufficient funding to achieve the Plan's goals. The Associate Director, Gender Equality, responded that UNICEF would continue to hold itself accountable to the 15 per cent benchmark of all funds received, in keeping with the benchmark set out in the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. She noted that in 2020, the organization had allocated 23 per cent of its received funds to gender-related work.

390. The group of delegations remarked that UNICEF continued to be a leader within the United Nations system as measured against the indicators of the System-wide Action Plan, and welcomed the focus on financing for gender-equality results and on gender parity at all levels of the organization, as well as the commitment to ensure gender expertise in all sectors, while noting the need for sufficient resources.

391. A delegation asked what steps UNICEF had taken towards internal gender parity for P5 and higher-level posts. The Associate Director responded that it was tracking the issue through various means, including a global management dashboard, and was developing talent pools and outreach mechanisms.

392. A delegation applauded the commitment by UNICEF to increase its influence and develop new partnerships; it urged the re-energizing of existing partnerships with donors and other United Nations agencies and joint efforts towards gender-sensitive and gender-responsive programming through the coordination clusters.

## **C. UNICEF programme cooperation**

### **(a) Country programme documents**

393. The CPDs for Albania, Armenia, Bangladesh, Botswana, Cameroon, Comoros, Eritrea, Guatemala, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Oman and Zimbabwe were considered by the Executive Board.

394. Following an introduction by the Director, Programme Group, the Director of Nutrition gave a presentation. He said that, as UNICEF rolled out its Nutrition

Strategy 2020–2030, the historic progress achieved in the previous two decades warranted acknowledgement: a one-third decline in stunting and a 55 million decline in the number of stunted children since 2000. Yet progress had been slow in reducing child wasting, and the number of overweight and obese children was increasing in every region. Shaping the face of child malnutrition were globalization, urbanization, increasing poverty and inequities, climate change and pandemics. To respond effectively, UNICEF was embracing six strategic shifts: focusing on the triple burden of malnutrition; adopting a comprehensive life-cycle approach to nutrition programming that included school-age children and adolescents; improving the quality of children’s diets and nutrition services and practices; implementing a systems approach to nutrition programming for maternal and child nutrition; paying greater attention to private sector engagement for improved nutrition results; and embracing a universal vision and agenda for nutrition relevant to all countries.

395. Following a video were two panel discussions, with panellists representing Governments, the United Nations system and civil society as well as a non-governmental organization and reflecting the 12 CPD-presenting countries. They detailed their collaboration with UNICEF on one of two themes: child undernutrition, including stunting, wasting and micronutrient deficiencies; and overweight and obesity among children.

396. The representatives of the CPD-presenting countries (Albania, Armenia, Bangladesh, Botswana, Cameroon, Comoros, Eritrea, Guatemala, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Oman and Zimbabwe) expressed their appreciation for the new CPDs and noted that they addressed the priorities of their respective Governments.

397. The representative of Azerbaijan said that the country attached great importance to its cooperation with UNICEF. He expressed his delegation’s concern regarding language in the draft CPD for Armenia, and called for harmonizing the language used by United Nations entities.

398. The representative of Armenia said that his country advocated for programmatic cooperation with the Member States and that UNICEF focused on the needs and human rights of children, particularly those in vulnerable situations.

399. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/15 on a no-objection basis (see annex I).

**(b) Extensions of ongoing country programmes**

400. The President stated that in accordance with Executive Board decision 2009/11, the Board had been informed of the first two-month extension of the multi-country programme for the Eastern Caribbean; the first two-month extensions of the country programmes for Belize, Guyana and Suriname, Honduras, Jamaica, Morocco, Peru, Thailand and Viet Nam; and the first one-year extensions of the country programmes for Brazil, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Gambia, Montenegro, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, South Sudan and the Sudan.

401. The Executive Board was requested to approve the two-month extensions of the country programmes for Algeria, El Salvador, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, following previous one-year extensions; the two-month extension of the country programme for Malaysia, following a two-month, a four-month and a six-month extension; the three-month extension of the country programme for Afghanistan, following a two-year extension; the three-month extension of the country programme for Maldives, following a one-year extension; the one-year extensions of the country programmes for Lebanon, Libya and Zambia, following previous one-year extensions; the one-year extension of the country programme for the Bolivarian

Republic of Venezuela, following two consecutive one-year extensions; the 14-month extension of the country programme for Haiti; and the two-year extension of the country programme for Djibouti.

402. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/16 (see annex I).

#### **D. Structured dialogue on financing the results of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2022**

403. The Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, introduced the item, followed by the Director, Public Partnerships Division, who presented the report (E/ICEF/2021/30), and then by the Representative, UNICEF Jordan, who shared examples of the importance of flexible resources for programmes in the field.

404. A delegation expressed its support for the UNICEF appeal for increased flexible funding, especially in light of the pandemic, applauded the successful fundraising efforts in 2020 and acknowledged the difficulty of securing long-term contributions. The delegation urged UNICEF to continue to innovate and to adapt its resource mobilization strategy, and looked forward to receiving future updates on results achieved through the World Bank financial instrument and the Dynamo Revolving Fund. The Director thanked the delegation for supporting the call for flexible funding and confirmed that UNICEF would provide updates at future Board sessions.

405. A delegation expressed concern about the decline in regular resources as a percentage of total funding over the previous eight years and solicited reflections from UNICEF regarding its efforts to increase the number of core-resource donors and secure more core, thematic and programmatic funding. The delegation encouraged UNICEF to increase its share of development-related expenditures through joint activities and to engage in dialogue with other entities. It asked about plans for harmonized indicators for implementation of the United Nations funding compact and the timeline for an agreed, operational definition of joint activities across United Nations entities.

406. The Director said that UNICEF shared the concerns about the decline in regular resources. To mobilize flexible funding, UNICEF would further improve its communications, explore new modalities, innovate, invest in expanding the funding base, accelerate engagement with key Member States and high-priority private sector partners, and integrate its public and private fundraising and partnerships efforts. UNICEF had been working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) to harmonize the definition of joint activities. It had prepared a draft option paper that had been shared with the Development Coordination Office along with offers of support to help further the work. The Deputy Executive Director noted that the United Nations agencies and UNICEF required a more nuanced understanding of partner needs as well as what it took to maintain public trust.

407. A delegation enquired about UNICEF plans to further engage in joint resource mobilization with other United Nations agencies. The Director said that UNICEF was working closely with other agencies, particularly at the country level, on joint engagement with donors as well as on joint resource mobilization through the UNSDCF. She said that this was similar to joint work carried out under the humanitarian appeals and the coordinated engagement and fundraising for humanitarian response.

408. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/17 (see annex).

## **E. Oral update on UNICEF humanitarian action**

409. The Director, Office of Emergency Programmes, presented an update on the use of humanitarian cash transfers and briefed the Executive Board on Afghanistan.

410. A delegation emphasized the need to sustain and expand the use of cash as a routine modality in humanitarian crises, even when challenging, and considered the leading role of UNICEF in developing the United Nations Common Cash Statement to be a positive step. The Director said that UNICEF was scaling up the use of cash in additional countries and that there had been strong uptake. The delegation asked what UNICEF saw as the future of adopting a public approach to data and interoperability. The Director reported that progress had been made on a common payment system, which was in use in more than 20 countries. He said that data-sharing was a growing priority and had informed the development of a UNICEF global data-management solution. UNICEF would continue to work on the legal regulations for sharing data with other United Nations agencies.

411. A delegation commended UNICEF for its COVID-19 programming adaptations; its focus on safe programming and meaningful, inclusive community engagement; and for using integrated programming to protect vulnerable populations. The delegation expressed appreciation for the plans to address the root causes of conflict, crisis and displacement through cross-cutting programmes and to prioritize holistic measures to address violence against women and children and other harmful practices.

412. A delegation asked how UNICEF would adapt to supporting increased humanitarian needs, especially with regard to localization, climate change-related disasters and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and requested UNICEF to provide details at the first regular session of 2022 on lessons learned from nexus programming and its efforts to measure success.

413. A delegation encouraged UNICEF to continue to build crisis-response capacity and develop preparedness plans that included rosters of experts. The Director reported that a team in his division had been tasked to work on preparedness and early action. Securing funding for preparedness remained a challenge, however, and he welcomed working with the delegations and other partners on the issue.

414. A delegation requested that the humanitarian action review report be made publicly available and that the Board receive an update on the implementation of its recommendations. The Director noted the two requests and confirmed that UNICEF had a strong commitment from its senior leadership to implement the recommendations.

415. The delegation said that it was important to prioritize gender- and disability-inclusive approaches and also encouraged UNICEF to build on the gains made on the localization agenda, as the organization played a critical role in addressing urgent nutritional needs against the backdrop of widespread famine.

416. Concerning Afghanistan, delegations asked whether female staff could work for humanitarian organizations and throughout the country, while another delegation asked what measures UNICEF would take to protect its national staff, particularly women. The Regional Director for South Asia said that staff working with the de facto administration had seen provincial variations in terms of women being allowed to return to work. UNICEF and its partners were advocating strongly on the issue, and had seen some encouraging signs in the facilities in which they operated. The Executive Director had approved several special measures to ensure the safety of UNICEF staff as well as exceptional measures for female staff at risk.

417. A delegation asked how the United Nations system and its agencies would manage the impact of sanctions and conditionalities. The Director emphasized the importance of preserving the humanitarian space and imperative in such places as Afghanistan. UNICEF looked forward to working with the delegates on how this could be done effectively. The delegation asked how the UNICEF field presence would help to ensure continued access for women and girls to services, and the views of UNICEF on the movement of people across the border into Pakistan and its impact on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities. The Regional Director said that the UNICEF “stay and deliver” policy was accompanied by a strong field presence throughout Afghanistan. UNICEF would continue to rely on the Board’s support in order to scale up programmes to meet the needs of the population.

418. A delegation asked whether UNICEF had experienced impediments to the safe delivery of humanitarian aid across Afghanistan. The Director responded that it was essential for humanitarian aid to be delivered safely throughout the country to those most in need and that UNICEF would speak out if any issues arose.

419. The delegation also asked how UNICEF aimed to improve engagement with affected populations throughout the programme cycle in Afghanistan, as well as generally. The Director said that UNICEF regularly used the U-Report system, with the Regional Director adding that its use by young people in Afghanistan had increased from 100,000 to 500,000 over the previous weeks and their active engagement had helped to shape the organization’s plans for its work in the country.

**F. Progress update on UNICEF experience in high-income countries and in countries transitioning from upper-middle-income to high-income status within the framework of the UNICEF universal agenda for child rights**

420. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, introduced the progress update ([E/ICEF/2021/26](#)), followed by the Director, Programme Group, who gave a presentation.

421. The Chair of the Standing Group of National Committees for UNICEF highlighted the universal mandate of UNICEF and reflected that the suffering of children knew no boundaries. While best known for providing substantial resources for the most disadvantaged children in the poorest countries, the National Committees were equally proud of their advocacy work for the most vulnerable children in high-income countries.

422. The Chair of the Standing Group highlighted the importance of the 2016 review of UNICEF experience in high-income countries and in countries transitioning from upper-middle-income to high-income status, as it had enabled the Executive Board to recognize the importance of advocacy and invite UNICEF to work with the National Committees to contribute to results in high-income countries. The 2021 progress update was another important step, as it drew attention to the plight of vulnerable children in high-income countries and described the professional and cost-effective ways by which National Committee advocacy had contributed to improving their lives.

423. The Chair of the Standing Group affirmed the commitment of the National Committees to lead efforts to uphold the principle of the universality of child rights in pursuit of a better, safer and more just and sustainable world for every child, working alongside Governments and all relevant entities of the United Nations.



## **G. Formative evaluation of UNICEF work to link humanitarian and development programming, and management response**

424. The Director of Evaluation presented the evaluation report and its summary (E/ICEF/2021/28) followed by the Deputy Director, Programme Group, who presented the management response (E/ICEF/2021/29).

425. Delegations welcomed the evaluation and commended UNICEF for its work to strengthen coherence across development, humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts, noting that such efforts were called for in the 2020 QCPR.

426. A group of delegations was encouraged by the steps taken to implement the evaluation's recommendations, including the addition of peacebuilding as a cross-cutting programming priority in the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. The group said that, as acknowledged in the QCPR, risks should be managed to avoid humanitarian crises. Immediate life-saving needs should be met while being connected with early recovery. Long-term investments in development were needed to address the root causes of fragility and conflict, and better coordination of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts was required to mitigate and reduce humanitarian needs.

427. The group called for UNICEF to foster organizational understanding on the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding approach to programming. Delegations urged UNICEF to address silos in planning, reporting, financing and staffing. The Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, noted that the silos resulted from the separation of humanitarian planning and broader country programming, including separate budget authorizations and reporting. Addressing such duplication would reduce the burden on country offices. UNICEF was studying ways to harmonize planning, reporting and funding as part of organizational improvement, and hoped for the Board's support. The organization was also seeking to bring programmes together, such as linking humanitarian cash transfers with social protection programmes.

428. Delegations called for capacity-building in comprehensive risk and conflict analysis; conflict-sensitive programming; shock-responsive social protection and resilience; and peacebuilding strengthening, while a delegation urged UNICEF to leverage its role as cluster lead and co-lead.

429. The group of delegations called for greater collaboration with local, national, regional and international actors, including other United Nations entities, the resident coordinator's office and international financial institutions, to tackle the multidimensional drivers of conflict. A delegation recalled the organization's comparative advantage and development-humanitarian mandate and urged it to support joint development and humanitarian planning at the country level.

430. Delegations emphasized the importance of ensuring accountability to affected populations and strengthening partnerships with local civil society organizations in both humanitarian and development work as well as strengthening local and national capacities for disaster risk management and resilience. A delegation encouraged UNICEF to link protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in humanitarian responses with protection, accountability and participatory approaches in development activities. The Deputy Director, Programme Group, noted that UNICEF was updating its safeguarding procedures in keeping with the principle of leveraging investments in humanitarian response into development work.

431. The group of delegations called for gender- and disability-responsive approaches, while a delegation called for UNICEF to integrate displaced populations into programme development.

432. The group of delegations looked forward to an update on the revised UNICEF Procedure on Linking Humanitarian and Development Programming. The Deputy

Director said that the Procedure, to be updated in 2022, would be aligned with the change strategies and indicators of the Strategic Plan and supported by a roll-out plan.

433. A delegation asked about the recommendation for a nexus marker. The Deputy Director responded that UNICEF had determined that adding an additional layer of markers and reporting would be burdensome for country offices. In addition, the spirit of the nexus was to better connect humanitarian and development work, rather than to add a new pillar. UNICEF was confident that it could measure its nexus work without such a marker through reporting on the Strategic Plan and with updates to the Board in the reports of the Executive Director.

434. A delegation, while expressing appreciation for the mention of peacebuilding in the Strategic Plan, noted that the goal of peacebuilding was to contribute to peaceful societies through social policies, including around education, WASH, health and social protection. As such, the delegation considered peacebuilding for UNICEF as equivalent to development work. Therefore, it saw peacebuilding as already included in the humanitarian-development link and the work of UNICEF as already making societies more prosperous and peaceful.

435. The delegation inquired as to why peacebuilding had been incorporated into an evaluation on linking humanitarian and development work. The Director of Evaluation responded that the title of the evaluation had been determined in 2019 and reflected the terminology current at that time. However, in keeping with broader policy currents, such as the QCPR, the Evaluation Office had requested the evaluation team to ask more broad-based and fundamental questions, including around peacebuilding. The Deputy Director, Programme Group, noted that the spirit of linking humanitarian and development interventions was to mitigate shocks by addressing underlying risks in a sustainable manner so that when shocks did occur, the resilience of communities obviated the need for urgent assistance. This could be accomplished only by reducing the risk of conflict by addressing the underlying drivers and supporting social cohesion. This work, which was mainstreamed throughout all the sectors in which UNICEF led, was done through the existing pillars.

436. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/18 (see annex).

## **H. Plan for global evaluations, 2022–2025: draft for review**

437. The Director of Evaluation presented the document ([E/ICEF/2021/27](#)), which had been prepared in accordance with the revised evaluation policy of UNICEF and relevant Executive Board decisions.

438. Two delegations commended UNICEF on the progress made in implementing the plan for global evaluations, 2018–2021. A delegation expressed appreciation for the well-balanced mix of evaluation products in the new plan, which would cover all Goal Areas, change strategies, enablers and cross-cutting priorities of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. The delegation also welcomed the efforts to build capacity for impact evaluations and looked forward to their more frequent implementation, including with other United Nations agencies.

439. The delegation welcomed the inclusion of evaluations on such strategically important issues as shock-responsive social protection systems and UNICEF capacity-development work in WASH programming. The delegation asked whether UNICEF planned to place greater evaluative focus on climate change and resilience. The Director of Evaluation confirmed that UNICEF would undertake evaluative work in those areas. The Evaluation Office was consulting with colleagues in the UNICEF programme and emergency teams to inform its approach, including engaging in evaluation partnerships, and to consider the complexities of the issues.

440. Recognizing the importance of knowledge generation and taking note of the absence of a budget in the plan, the delegation asked UNICEF to provide additional information on the resources allocated to the Evaluation Office, including for the implementation of the plan. The Director responded that the budget for evaluations in 2022 had been secured, and that funding for the period 2022–2025 would be included in the final plan for global evaluations, which would be presented to the Executive Board at its first regular session of 2022.

441. A delegation asked for elaboration on the assertion in the plan that much of the work of the Evaluation Office over the previous year and a half had been geared towards helping UNICEF to understand the pandemic's effect on outcomes for children. The Director said that there were abundant insights arising from the COVID-19 response in relation to the work of UNICEF as well as across all sectors. He added that, if the Executive Board so wished, the Evaluation Office would present its synthesis of lessons learned, good practices and key takeaways at the next Executive Board session.

## **I. UNICEF integrated budget, 2022–2025**

### **UNICEF integrated budget, 2022–2025: report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions**

442. The Deputy Executive Director, Management, introduced the UNICEF integrated budget, 2022–2025 and its annex ([E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.6](#), [E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.6/Corr.1](#) and [E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.6/Add.1](#)), followed by a presentation by the Comptroller and Director, Division of Financial and Administrative Management. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) report ([E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.7](#)) was available for information.

443. In their national statements, two delegations recognized the role of the integrated budget in supporting the implementation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, with one urging the optimization of resource mobilization and a more effective and efficient use of funds in accordance with the Goal Areas. The delegation added that agency budgets should be actively controlled and programme expenditures increased to ensure that UNICEF could improve its performance and implement country programmes.

444. A delegation expressed appreciation for the presentation of financial estimates in line with the harmonized cost classifications, as directed by the Board, and the presentation of cost-recovery projections in line with the Board-approved harmonized methodology. The delegation supported the UNICEF appeal for increased contributions to regular resources and noted that 83 per cent of core resources had been allocated to programmes. The delegation also supported the ACABQ recommendation to expand the text and tables in the budget, starting with the midterm review.

445. Referring to the ACABQ report, the delegation asked UNICEF to confirm whether it was budgeting less for United Nations resident coordination activities. The Comptroller clarified that UNICEF had not decreased its contributions; rather, they had increased, from \$35 million to \$40 million. The overall comparative decrease in funding was associated with the removal of the humanitarian cluster coordination component from the category of United Nations development coordination, and its inclusion under emergency programmes, in order to facilitate comparison with the other New York-based United Nations funds and programmes. The Comptroller also noted that the request of the ACABQ for additional budget details was not unique to UNICEF, and that the organization would work with the other funds and programmes

to ensure that, during the midterm review, the details requested would be presented in a harmonized manner to facilitate comparison.

446. The delegation asked UNICEF to clarify its position with regard to the statement in the report that funding of the resident coordinator system through assessed contributions from Member States was the organization's preference. The delegation questioned whether UNICEF had considered the potential unintended consequences of commingling operations with different funding models. The Comptroller responded that recognizable benefits could be accrued from tapping into additional funding sources to realize operational objectives. Broadening the funding stream beyond current sources (coordination levy, contributions from other funds and programmes, voluntary contributions) to include assessed contributions from the Member States would facilitate the achievement of the goals of the resident coordinator mechanism.

447. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/19 (see annex).

## **J. Private Fundraising and Partnerships: financial report for the year ended 31 December 2020**

448. The Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, introduced the item, followed by the Director, Private Fundraising and Partnerships Division, who presented the report ([E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.8](#)).

449. A group of delegations took note of the increases in private sector revenue and regular resource income from the private sector in 2020 and commended UNICEF on the excellent results and the levels of return from investment funds. The group requested information on the private sector income targets for the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. The Director said that those projections were included in the integrated budget that was being considered at the session.

450. The group asked how the high-value partnerships would deliver concrete results and how private sector partners could mitigate risks to children posed by their business activities. The Director explained that, in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, UNICEF was scaling up its efforts to mainstream its work around child rights and business and business for results under the Programme Group, so that the private sector was integrated by default into the organization's thinking at the country, regional and global levels. This was important, because business for results was not about funding per se, but rather about working with businesses as partners to influence their practices, whether regarding supply chains or child labour.

451. The group encouraged UNICEF, given its leading role in engagement with business, to share with other United Nations entities its experiences in non-financial private-sector engagement. It also requested information about the organization's partnerships with those entities as well as about its partnerships with international financial institutions with regard to private sector mobilization and contributions to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Director said that the exchange of expertise with other agencies was ongoing amid evolving approaches to fundraising and a changing fundraising landscape.

452. The group asked how UNICEF was tackling the preference of business to provide earmarked funding and how its strategic priorities would contribute to an increase in regular resources. The Director said that UNICEF had been encouraging soft earmarking and multi-year contributions to establish longer-term relationships that could result in core contributions. The group said that it would welcome an update on the Private Fundraising and Partnerships investment strategy at the first regular session of 2022. The Director noted that the new strategy needed to be flexible and account for both digital and traditional means of fundraising.

453. The group recalled Executive Board decision 2021/5, in which the Board approved the World Bank financial instrument as a pilot project. The group requested UNICEF to share details of its actions to expand its options for financing by seeking General Assembly approval to amend the UNICEF Financial Regulations and Rules. The Director confirmed that the Board would be updated on the issue.

454. A delegation expressed its appreciation for the report and for the conservative approach used to set the 2020 revenue target. The delegation noted that business had been the only source of private sector revenue that had not shown an increase in 2020, although it highlighted that more than half of private sector revenue for the COVID-19 response had come from business. The delegation encouraged UNICEF to use private sector expertise to continue to deliver results for children. It asked that the Executive Board be provided with information on the risk-management measures that UNICEF would employ as part of its fundraising and partnerships strategy. The Director confirmed close, ongoing work with UNICEF management to ensure data security and robust systems, especially around online credit card payments by individual donors.

455. The Chair of the Standing Group of National Committees for UNICEF reported that, in 2020, National Committees had been responsible for 85 per cent of net private sector results. However, the power of partnering with business to maximize results for every child had not yet been fully realized. Together with UNICEF, the National Committees would consider new business models, alternative financing and a move from transactional to transformational ways of working.

456. The Executive Director said that the presentation demonstrated the power of unrestricted resources as a leverage point and emphasized that the more flexible resources UNICEF received, the more it could invest in its programmes for children.

457. The Executive Board adopted decision 2021/20 (see annex I).

## **K. Other matters**

### **Provisional list of agenda items for the first regular session of 2022**

458. The provisional list of agenda items was presented by the Secretary of the Executive Board.

## **L. Adoption of draft decisions**

459. The Executive Board adopted decisions 2021/14 through 2021/20 (see annex I).

460. A group of delegations expressed its confidence that the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 would provide UNICEF with the guidance necessary to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals for all children globally. The impact of the pandemic and the climate crisis had demonstrated that the progress made so far could not be taken for granted. It was important to ensure that no one was left behind while recovering and building a better, greener future. Welcoming the adoption of the decision on the Strategic Plan as timely and necessary, the group said that it set a clear, ambitious vision for the future and provided a global framework to enable UNICEF to best fulfil its mandate and support countries in delivering on their national development needs and priorities. The group expressed appreciation for the consultative and inclusive process towards the Plan's development as well as the efforts of UNICEF to strengthen its collaboration with UNDP, UNFPA and UN-Women.

461. The group acknowledged that the UNICEF family represented many different views, cultures and backgrounds, but that, like a family, it overcame those differences

to enable UNICEF to do what it did best: deliver for all children in need. It wished UNICEF the best of luck in translating the Plan into national strategies and CPDs, in dialogue, as always, with national authorities.

462. A delegation noted that it had joined the consensus on the Strategic Plan decision in the spirit of compromise and out of respect for the UNICEF mandate to protect all children. The delegation thanked the facilitator of the decision for his hard work, as well as all the Member States for the compromises they had made. However, the delegation noted for the record that it continued to have reservations on the Plan itself, as it contained non-consensual terms and broadened the UNICEF mandate. The delegation said that it would continue to work with UNICEF in the traditional areas of its mandate, including children's health, survival, education, social protection, WASH and humanitarian work.

## **M. Closing statements by the Executive Director of UNICEF and the President of the Executive Board**

463. The Executive Director expressed her thanks to the President, the Bureau and the Executive Board for uniting behind the new Strategic Plan and to all who had contributed to its development. Its endorsement was a critical first step in guiding the work of UNICEF over the next four years as it helped the world to emerge from the pandemic and worked towards realizing the Sustainable Development Goals. It would help children to tackle today's complex challenges, including climate change, conflict, poverty and barriers to learning and skills training. Prominently featuring climate, gender, disability and non-discrimination, it would empower children and young people as agents of change. The Plan also provided a framework for reaching children in middle- and high-income countries.

464. She asked the Board to champion the UNICEF appeal for an increased proportion of regular resources, as flexible funding was key to the organization's ability to respond to crises while sustaining development programming, and to urge the Member States to meet the funding compact target for core resources. Engagement with private sector partners, led by the National Committees, would continue to play a pivotal role.

465. The Executive Director appreciated the positive reception to the Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025; warmly welcomed the CPDs, which reflected extensive consultation to address the priorities of each national Government and would enable UNICEF to make an impact on the ground; and noted that UNICEF would continue to work through the COVAX Facility to ensure the delivery of millions more doses of COVID-19 vaccine. She highlighted that UNICEF was sustaining and scaling up humanitarian action for children in crisis, including in Afghanistan, and said that UNICEF would strive to provide access to online learning while continuing to advocate for the reopening of classrooms.

466. She announced that the next issue of *The State of the World's Children* would focus on mental health, sending a clear signal of the commitment to champion investment in mental health and psychosocial support systems. And in all the areas in which the organization worked, whether immunization to save lives, distance learning to save futures, water to save communities or mental health to save families, UNICEF staff and its dedicated partners would stay and deliver for children.

467. The Executive Director expressed her gratitude to the Executive Board and to the Presidents with whom she had worked for their guidance and support to UNICEF over her tenure and thanked the Deputy Executive Directors, the Regional Directors and other colleagues. She considered her leadership of the organization to have been a privilege and an honour and would always keep UNICEF in her heart. She asked

that every opportunity continue to be sought to make a difference in the lives of children and young people around the world.

468. The President of the Executive Board invited the participants to join him in celebrating the accomplishments made during the session. He congratulated the Executive Board, whose efforts had paved the way to the consensual endorsement of the Strategic Plan, which would help UNICEF to improve the lives of millions of children and women and move the organization closer to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. He expressed confidence that the Board would continue its constructive collaboration with UNICEF for the full implementation of the Plan.

469. The President reminded the delegates of the many challenges facing UNICEF and the context in which it strived to realize rights for every child, particularly the most vulnerable and excluded. He emphasized the criticality of flexible, unrestricted core resources for the organization's work and noted that the pandemic had underscored the importance of such funds in helping UNICEF to modernize, streamline, innovate and adapt to evolving needs.

470. He thanked his fellow Bureau members, the facilitators of the draft decisions, the experts, UNICEF senior management and the staff of the Office of the Secretary of the Executive Board as well the United Nations conference staff and interpreters for their contributions to the session's success.

471. The President invited the delegates to give the Executive Director a round of applause. He said that her contributions had energized her staff, led the organization to broaden its areas of work and enabled UNICEF to remain one of the best-known and best-loved United Nations entities. He closed the meeting by recognizing the Executive Director's excellent stewardship of UNICEF and the firm ground upon which she would leave the organization as it began to implement the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025.

## Annex I

### Decisions adopted by the Executive Board in 2021

#### First regular session, 9–12 February 2021

2021/1

##### Country programme documents

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* that the country programme documents, including aggregate indicative budgets, for Azerbaijan, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Georgia, North Macedonia, Panama, Somalia, Tunisia, Uruguay and Uzbekistan ([E/ICEF/2021/P/L.1–E/ICEF/2021/P/L.3](#) and [E/ICEF/2021/P/L.5–E/ICEF/2021/P/L.12](#)) were made available to Member States for their comments and input from 17 November to 7 December 2020;

2. *Approves* on a no-objection basis, and in accordance with decision 2014/1, the country programme documents, including aggregate indicative budgets, for Azerbaijan, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Georgia, North Macedonia, Panama, Somalia, Tunisia, Uruguay and Uzbekistan ([E/ICEF/2021/P/L.1–E/ICEF/2021/P/L.3](#), [E/ICEF/2021/P/L.5–E/ICEF/2021/P/L.12](#) and [E/ICEF/2021/P/L.7/Corr.1](#)).

*First regular session  
9 February 2021*

2021/2

##### Extensions of ongoing country programmes

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the four-month extension of the country programmes for Armenia and Malaysia, following a two-month extension; and the first one-year extension of the country programmes for Croatia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mongolia and the United Republic of Tanzania, which were approved by the Executive Director and are presented in table 1 of document [E/ICEF/2021/P/L.13/Rev.1](#);

2. *Approves* the four-month extension of the country programme for the Syrian Arab Republic, following two consecutive one-year extensions, a nine-month extension, a three-month extension and a two-month extension; and the one-year extension of the country programme for Tajikistan, following a one-year extension; these are presented in table 2 of document [E/ICEF/2021/P/L.13/Rev.1](#).

*First regular session  
9 February 2021*

2021/3

##### Evaluation reports and management responses

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note with appreciation* of the evaluation of UNICEF work for children in urban settings, its summary ([E/ICEF/2021/3](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2021/4](#));

2. *Requests* UNICEF to place a particular focus on children and adolescents in vulnerable situations and those experiencing marginalization in the assessments of



needs and in the provision of quality education and health; healthy diets and improved nutrition; and water, sanitation and hygiene and social protection services, to ensure that no child is left behind;

3. *Also requests* UNICEF to continue to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including those in urban settings, by enhancing and accelerating gender mainstreaming through the full implementation of the System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021 to ensure the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

4. *Further requests* UNICEF to adequately reflect its work for children in urban settings in the results areas, targets and indicators of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, to strengthen sector-specific approaches in urban contexts, based on full respect for and fulfilment of human rights, and to promote the coordination, collaboration, coherence and complementarity of respective humanitarian and development programming, while working together, as appropriate, with relevant United Nations agencies;

5. *Requests* UNICEF to coordinate its urban-related work with UN-Habitat in order to avoid duplication and leverage each organization's value added;

6. *Takes note with appreciation* of the evaluation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, its summary (E/ICEF/2021/5) and its management response (E/ICEF/2021/6);

7. *Welcomes* the envisaged strong focus of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 on contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and on outcome-level results, with the development of a longer-term strategy with a horizon of 2030, including a phased implementation plan;

8. *Notes with appreciation* the recommendations of the evaluation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 on multisectoral approaches and encourages UNICEF to make full use of the opportunities presented by the United Nations development system reform to foster integrated methods and actions and continue to develop practical programme solutions to contribute to stronger intra- and inter-agency cooperation, coherence, coordination and complementarity in the delivery of United Nations operations at the country level, in line with each entity's respective mandate, and requests UNICEF to address internal siloed, non-coordinated approaches and to strengthen multisectoral and integrated programming approaches in the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025;

9. *Takes note* of the fact that the evaluation did not include thematic funding performance in its analysis and requests UNICEF to take into account the promotion of thematic funding and the aim of improving the quality and predictability of funding when developing the design and structure of the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025;

10. *Welcomes* the UNICEF commitment to put a stronger focus on outcome-level results, while underlining the importance of also monitoring the unique contribution of UNICEF to country-level outcomes, emphasizing that establishing the link between UNICEF country outputs and global performance is essential to ensure accountability;

11. *Encourages* UNICEF to further improve collaboration, coordination, coherence and complementarity between internal humanitarian and development processes, while continuing to strengthen its systems and capacity to deliver principled humanitarian assistance, and to support countries to develop or strengthen policies and programmes related to peacebuilding in conflict-affected countries.

*First regular session  
12 February 2021*

**2021/4**  
**UNICEF financial report and audited financial statements for the year ended**  
**31 December 2019 and report of the Board of Auditors, and management response**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the unqualified audit opinion for 2019 issued by the Board of Auditors, the report of the Board of Auditors for the financial period that ended on 31 December 2019 ([A/75/5/Add.3](#)) as well as the management response ([E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.2](#));

2. *Acknowledges* the progress achieved by UNICEF in the implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors for the financial period ended 31 December 2019, welcomes the further measures planned by the organization and requests UNICEF to continue implementing the recommendations of the Board of Auditors from prior years for closure;

3. *Recalls* its decision 2020/6 and takes note of the shortfalls in the harmonized approach to cash transfers (HACT) assurance activities and therefore requests UNICEF to ensure the achievement of the minimum level of HACT assurance activities and of the monitoring of cash assistance implementing partners;

4. *Also recalls* its decision 2018/3 and requests UNICEF to continue its efforts to prevent and detect instances of fraud, to thoroughly review the underlying circumstances that led to the cases of fraud in order to minimize future risks and to take steps to improve actions for the recovery of funds.

*First regular session*  
*10 February 2021*

**2021/5**  
**Private Fundraising and Partnerships: 2021 workplan and proposed budget**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the Private Fundraising and Partnerships: 2021 workplan and proposed budget ([E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.1](#)) and the World Bank instrument to facilitate sustained investment in private sector fundraising ([E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.1/Add.2](#));

2. *Notes* the high, medium and low revenue scenarios for 2021, as shown in table 3 of document [E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.1](#);

3. *Approves* a budget for special purpose activities of \$153 million from regular resources, comprising \$85 million for investment funds and \$68 million for other private sector fundraising costs, and the establishment of an other resources ceiling of \$58.4 million based on the medium scenario in table 3 of document [E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.1](#);

4. *Authorizes* UNICEF

(a) To redeploy resources between the various regular resources budget lines (as detailed in paragraph 3, above), up to a maximum of 10 per cent of the amounts approved;

(b) To decrease or increase expenditures up to the levels indicated in columns I and III of table 3 of document [E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.1](#) should the apparent revenue from fundraising decrease or increase to the levels indicated in columns I and III;

(c) To spend an additional amount between Executive Board sessions, when necessary, up to the amount caused by currency fluctuations, to implement the 2021 approved workplan;

5. *Encourages* the Executive Director to identify and respond to new market opportunities, should they arise, between Executive Board sessions and to notify the Board accordingly;

6. *Approves* an interim one-month allocation for January 2022 of \$15.3 million (or 10 per cent of the special purpose regular resources allocation of \$153 million), to be absorbed into the annual Private Fundraising and Partnerships budget for 2022;

7. *Authorizes* the Executive Director, with the advice of the Comptroller, to execute the financial instrument in partnership with the World Bank to raise additional financing for investment in private sector fundraising, as a pilot project limited to an amount of \$50 million, leveraging the World Bank's expertise in financial markets, provided that no regular resources will be used towards the repayment of the principal amount or interest owed to the World Bank, as per the payment conditions, and requests UNICEF to report to the Executive Board on the financial performance and the attainment of goals and corresponding costs and capacities annually at the first regular session;

8. *Requests* UNICEF to present to the Executive Board at the 2021 annual session the results of its consultations with the 18 emerging market countries as well as other relevant actors of the United Nations system, along with an updated, comprehensive risk management matrix, information on the opinion of the Office of Legal Affairs on the agreement with the World Bank instrument, principal amount, interest costs and other associated fees and a written assessment of the need to update the UNICEF Financial Regulations and Rules;

9. *Emphasizes* that this World Bank instrument is considered a pilot project and limited operation, which shall be evaluated before a repeat engagement may be considered;

10. *Requests* UNICEF to ensure that the conditions of this instrument are made fully transparent to potential investors and that any public promotion of corresponding investments by investors shall similarly transparently reflect the instrument's conditions;

11. *Endorses* the establishment of a revolving fund (the Dynamo Revolving Fund) that will provide sustainable financial capacity for investment in private sector fundraising for UNICEF country and regional offices and requests UNICEF to report annually to the Executive Board on the status of the revolving fund (the Dynamo Revolving Fund) in the document entitled "Private Fundraising and Partnerships: financial report", which is presented to the Executive Board at its second regular session.

*First regular session  
11 February 2021*

## Annual session, 1–4 June 2021

2021/6

### Annual report for 2020 of the Executive Director of UNICEF

#### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the annual report for 2020 of the Executive Director of UNICEF as well as the report on the implementation of the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021; the report on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system; the joint annex on the implementation of the common chapter of the strategic plans, 2018–2021 of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children’s Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women); and the data companion and scorecard;

2. *Commends* UNICEF for achieving important targets and milestones in many areas of its work outlined in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 and the annual report, and encourages UNICEF to continue to improve the outcome-level effects of its programmes in all sectors relevant to the UNICEF mandate and to address factors that constrain development breakthroughs to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in its next Strategic Plan, 2022–2025;

3. *Decides* to transmit the above-mentioned reports to the Economic and Social Council, along with a summary of the comments and guidance of the Executive Board;

4. *Takes note* of the UNICEF report on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit, including the management responses to the 14 recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit intended for consideration by the Executive Board.

*Annual session  
4 June 2021*

2021/7

### Annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action

#### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the annual report on UNICEF humanitarian action (E/ICEF/2021/13);

2. *Commends* the efforts of UNICEF to undertake a review of its humanitarian operations in the context of new global challenges and looks forward to the subsequent publication of the report “Strengthening UNICEF’s humanitarian action, The Humanitarian Review: findings and recommendations”;

3. *Calls* on UNICEF to implement the review’s recommendations as soon as possible and to provide regular updates to the Executive Board on its progress in this regard.

*Annual session  
4 June 2021*

**2021/8**

**Country programme documents**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* that the country programme document, including the aggregate indicative budget, for Argentina ([E/ICEF/2021/P/L.15](#)), was made available to Member States for their comments and input from 10 to 30 March 2021;

2. *Approves* on a no-objection basis, and in accordance with decision 2014/1, the country programme document, including the aggregate indicative budget, for Argentina ([E/ICEF/2021/P/L.15](#)).

*Annual session*  
*3 June 2021*

**2021/9**

**Extensions of ongoing country programmes**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the three-month extension of the country programme for Armenia, following a two-month extension and a four-month extension; and the six-month extension of the country programme for Malaysia, following a two-month extension and a four-month extension, both of which were approved by the Executive Director and are presented in table 1 of document [E/ICEF/2021/P/L.14](#);

2. *Approves* the three-month extension of the country programme for Madagascar, following a one-year extension and a six-month extension; and the eight-month extension of the country programme for the Syrian Arab Republic, following two consecutive one-year extensions, a nine-month extension, a three-month extension, a two-month extension and a four-month extension, as presented in table 2 of document [E/ICEF/2021/P/L.14](#).

*Annual session*  
*4 June 2021*

**2021/10**

**Evaluation reports and management responses**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the annual report for 2020 on the evaluation function in UNICEF ([E/ICEF/2021/18](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2021/19](#));

2. *Takes note with appreciation* of the global evaluation of UNICEF water, sanitation and hygiene programming in protracted crises, 2014–2019, its summary ([E/ICEF/2021/20](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2021/21](#));

3. *Also takes note with appreciation* of the significant increase in the number of evaluative products and of the increase in evaluation coverage;

4. *Welcomes* the recruitment of 16 multi-country evaluation specialists in order to increase evaluation capacities at the country and regional levels;

5. *Recalls* the funding target of 1 per cent of programme expenditure for evaluation and notes with concern the expenditure of only 0.64 per cent of total programme expenditure on evaluation in 2020, acknowledging the special circumstances of conducting evaluations during the current pandemic;

6. *Requests* UNICEF to take adequate measures to facilitate a significant increase in the share of spending on evaluation relative to total programme expenditure, especially by country offices that spend significantly less than 1 per cent of programme expenditure on evaluation;

7. *Notes with concern* the lower availability of resources from the Evaluation Pooled Fund and requests UNICEF to ensure the continuously adequate funding of the evaluation function;

8. *Welcomes* the decision by UNICEF to establish a quality-assurance procedure for the evaluation function;

9. *Also welcomes* UNICEF initiatives to promote innovative evaluation technologies and approaches and encourages UNICEF to continue to develop and implement options with regard to remote evaluations and innovative digital approaches, without compromising the quality of evaluations, and requests UNICEF to provide, in the annual report for 2021 on the evaluation function, updates on the application of innovative technologies and approaches, including a discussion of associated risks and UNICEF management plans to address them;

10. *Encourages* UNICEF to devote appropriate resources to evaluations designed to proactively search for scalable solutions that address evidence and knowledge gaps in key programmatic areas for both UNICEF and the global development community;

11. *Also encourages* UNICEF to consider increasing the use of rigorous impact evaluations to further improve its programming approaches and asks UNICEF to ensure that the findings of such evaluations contribute to relevant applicable areas of UNICEF policy and programming of the Strategic Plan and to building the global evidence and knowledge base for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

*Annual session  
4 June 2021*

## **2021/11**

### **Report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2020, and management response**

#### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the report of the Ethics Office of UNICEF for 2020 (E/ICEF/2021/16) and its management response (E/ICEF/2021/17);

2. *Requests* UNICEF to apply effective measures to improve the confidence of UNICEF staff in their protection against retaliation when reporting misconduct, and to further improve the organizational culture within UNICEF;

3. *Takes note with appreciation* of the Ethics Office membership in the Task Team on Anti-Racism and Discrimination and encourages the Office to play an active role, as an independent office, in the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Team;

4. *Also takes note with appreciation* of the continued strong collaboration of the Office with the cross-divisional sexual exploitation and abuse working group, the Child Safeguarding Unit and the Principal Adviser, Organizational Culture.

*Annual session  
4 June 2021*

2021/12

**UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations 2020 annual report to the Executive Board, and management response**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations 2020 annual report to the Executive Board ([E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.3](#)), its addendum ([E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.3/Add.1](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.4](#)), as well as the UNICEF Audit Advisory Committee 2020 annual report to the Executive Board, and welcomes the overall opinion of the adequacy and effectiveness of the organization's framework of governance, risk management and control;

2. *Also takes note* of the revised Charter of the UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations ([E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.5](#));

3. *Requests* UNICEF to provide information on the additional resources needs for the Office to address coverage gaps, as part of the submissions for the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 and integrated budget, 2022–2025, recalls its decision 2020/20, paragraph 4, and requests UNICEF to ensure that adequate human, financial and technology resources are provided to the Office;

4. *Welcomes* the rapid adaptation of the Office's activities to address challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and encourages the Office to continue to evaluate and explore the further use of remote audits and investigations without compromising the quality of its work, and requests UNICEF to provide an update in the UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations 2021 annual report to the Executive Board on both the benefits and the risks of the use of remote work and other innovative technologies and approaches to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the Office's work;

5. *Recalls* its decision 2020/20, paragraph 5, and encourages UNICEF to continue working with the other United Nations funds and programmes to harmonize definitions and reporting for audit and investigation matters and, where applicable, to provide the Executive Board with a more coherent overview of findings and results, and requests the Office to include in its annual report for the year 2021 information on progress in this regard;

6. *Notes with concern* the increase in numbers of actions pending implementation for more than 18 months and encourages the Office and UNICEF management to work together to close these recommendations in a timely manner.

*Annual session  
4 June 2021*

2021/13

**Update on the implementation of General Assembly resolution [72/279](#) on the repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the update on the implementation of General Assembly resolution [72/279](#) on the repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (QCPR);

2. *Urges* UNICEF to continue to implement resolution [72/279](#) and the organization's funding compact commitments, and looks forward to seeing the guidance of both reflected in the upcoming Strategic Plan with the aim of improving and better capturing its programme delivery and impact on the ground;

3. *Encourages* UNICEF to design its Integrated Results and Resources Framework in line with applicable guidance of the 2020 QCPR and requests UNICEF to harmonize, where appropriate, its Integrated Results and Resources Framework with other United Nations entities, with a focus on all results levels, and maximize the use of common results indicators, all with the goal of advancing United Nations development system contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals and to further strengthen system-wide evaluation;

4. *Requests* UNICEF to provide in a timely manner, ahead of the second regular session of 2021, more-detailed information on the Integrated Results and Resources Framework, including on its relationship to the QCPR monitoring and reporting framework.

*Annual session  
4 June 2021*

## **Second regular session, 7–10 September 2021**

**2021/14**

### **UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025**

#### *The Executive Board*

1. *Notes with appreciation* the inclusive and wide-ranging consultative process undertaken by UNICEF in developing the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, including the extensive engagement with the Executive Board;

2. *Also notes with appreciation* the efforts undertaken by UNICEF to align its Strategic Plan with General Assembly resolutions [70/1](#) of 25 September 2015, entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, and [75/233](#) of 21 December 2020 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system;

3. *Endorses* the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 ([E/ICEF/2021/25](#) and [E/ICEF/2021/25/Add.1](#)), which shall be implemented consistent with this decision, takes note of its annexes and requests UNICEF to provide updated baselines and targets for the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the new Strategic Plan to the Executive Board at the annual session of the Executive Board in 2022;

4. *Notes* that the Strategic Plan is the overall strategic framework for UNICEF and is not intergovernmentally negotiated, and acknowledges that the Strategic Plan includes some terms that have not been intergovernmentally endorsed in the United Nations system;

5. *Requests* UNICEF to implement the Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 in accordance with the principles of national ownership of programme countries, taking into account their national priorities and needs, recognizing their different contexts and particular characteristics, guided by international human rights treaties and humanitarian principles for humanitarian assistance;

6. *Also requests* UNICEF to present to the Executive Board at its annual session of 2024 a thorough midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 and its annexes and, if required, updates to the Plan and the Integrated Results and Resources Framework to ensure an effective implementation, sound monitoring and improved results to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030;



7. *Recalls* its decision 2021/13, paragraph 3, and requests UNICEF to include in the reports of the Executive Director on the implementation of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, including in its midterm review, information on results jointly achieved with United Nations development system entities identified through common and complementary indicators.

*Second regular session  
10 September 2021*

## **2021/15**

### **Country programme documents**

#### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* that the country programme documents, including aggregate indicative budgets, for Albania, Armenia, Bangladesh, Botswana, Cameroon, Comoros, Eritrea, Guatemala, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Oman and Zimbabwe ([E/ICEF/2021/P/L.16–E/ICEF/2021/P/L.27](#) and [E/ICEF/2021/P/L.22/Corr.1](#)) were made available to the Member States for their comments and input from 16 June to 6 July 2021;

2. *Approves* on a no-objection basis, and in accordance with decision 2014/1, the country programme documents, including aggregate indicative budgets, for Albania, Armenia, Bangladesh, Botswana, Cameroon, Comoros, Eritrea, Guatemala, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Oman and Zimbabwe ([E/ICEF/2021/P/L.16–E/ICEF/2021/P/L.27](#) and [E/ICEF/2021/P/L.22/Corr.1](#)).

*Second regular session  
8 September 2021*

## **2021/16**

### **Extensions of ongoing country programmes**

#### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the first two-month extension of the multi-country programme for the Eastern Caribbean; the first two-month extensions of the country programmes for Belize, Guyana and Suriname, Honduras, Jamaica, Morocco, Peru, Thailand and Viet Nam; and the first one-year extensions of the country programmes for Brazil, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Gambia, Montenegro, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, South Sudan and the Sudan, all of which were approved by the Executive Director and are presented in table 1 of document [E/ICEF/2021/P/L.28](#);

2. *Approves* the two-month extensions of the country programmes for Algeria, El Salvador, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, following previous one-year extensions; the two-month extension of the country programme for Malaysia, following a two-month, a four-month and a six-month extension; the three-month extension of the country programme for Afghanistan, following a two-year extension; the three-month extension of the country programme for Maldives, following a one-year extension; the one-year extensions of the country programmes for Lebanon, Libya and Zambia, following previous one-year extensions; the one-year extension of the country programme for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, following two consecutive one-year extensions; the 14-month extension of the country programme for Haiti; and the two-year extension of the country programme for Djibouti, as presented in table 2 of document [E/ICEF/2021/P/L.28](#).

*Second regular session  
10 September 2021*

**2021/17**  
**Structured dialogue on financing the results of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the structured dialogue on financing the results of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 ([E/ICEF/2021/30](#));
2. *Notes* the importance of sufficient and predictable regular resources, which are critical for UNICEF to be able to, inter alia, continue to respond to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, continue the roll-out of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A)/COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility and equitably reach all children everywhere to meet and fulfil their rights and support their access to sustainable development;
3. *Also notes* the importance of flexible thematic funding, which is critical for UNICEF to be able to accelerate programming to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in those areas in which development gains have been eroded by the COVID-19 pandemic;
4. *Recalls* the importance of predictable and multi-year funding, and requests UNICEF to continue engaging with Member States and other partners to consider increasing contributions to UNICEF, prioritizing regular resources and thematic funding, but also to provide other resources in a timely and foreseeable manner, in line with the funding compact, and also requests UNICEF to continue its efforts in terms of visibility and recognition of contributions, in particular for regular resources.

*Second regular session*  
*10 September 2021*

**2021/18**  
**Formative evaluation of UNICEF work to link humanitarian and development programming, and management response**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note with appreciation* of the formative evaluation of UNICEF work to link humanitarian and development programming, its summary ([E/ICEF/2021/28](#)) and its management response ([E/ICEF/2021/29](#));
2. *Recalling* Executive Board decision 2021/3, paragraph 11, and General Assembly resolution [75/233](#) on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, commends efforts by UNICEF to enhance coordination, coherence and collaboration between its humanitarian and development work, including contributions to peacebuilding in conflict-affected countries;
3. *Requests* UNICEF, in the implementation of the recommendations of the formative evaluation, to continue to be guided by its humanitarian and development mandate, and also requests UNICEF to report back to the Executive Board on its progress in this regard through existing reporting.

*Second regular session*  
*10 September 2021*

**2021/19**  
**UNICEF integrated budget, 2022–2025**

*The Executive Board*

1. *Welcomes* the UNICEF integrated budget, 2022–2025 (E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.6, E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.6/Corr.1 and E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.6/Add.1) in response to its request, in its decision 2009/20, for UNICEF to present a single, integrated budget that includes all UNICEF budgetary categories, with an improved results focus and enhanced linkages with the Strategic Plan results and harmonized in methodology and presentation, including on cost classification, attribution and recovery, with the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), as approved by the Executive Board in its decision 2020/24 on the joint comprehensive cost-recovery policy (DP/FPA-ICEF-UNW/2020/1);

2. *Also welcomes* the transparent and consultative process undertaken by UNICEF in the development of the integrated resource plan and the integrated budget estimates for the period 2022–2025;

3. *Acknowledges with appreciation* the inclusion of a new cost-classification category on independent oversight and assurance activities, with separate budget lines for the UNICEF Evaluation Office and the UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and Investigations, as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen and clarify financial reporting to further improve Member States' understanding of the financial position of UNICEF;

4. *Takes note* of the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.7) on the institutional components of the UNICEF integrated resource plan and integrated budget estimates and the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, and requests UNICEF to address the recommendations and to report back to the Executive Board on actions taken;

5. *Approves* the integrated resource plan as the financial framework for the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, based on projections of resources available, utilization and regular resource reserve;

6. *Also approves* for the Global and Regional Programme a budget from regular resources of \$235 million, subject to the availability of resources, and other resources of \$1,446.7 million, subject to the receipt of contributions to other resources, for the period 2022–2025;

7. *Authorizes* the Executive Director to establish additional director-level positions, as required, to be funded from within the approved institutional budget, and to report to the Executive Board in the annual report of the Executive Director;

8. *Approves* an appropriation for the institutional budget for the period 2022–2025 of \$2,738.2 million to cover the costs of development effectiveness, United Nations development coordination, management activities and, within special purpose activities, capital investments, and notes that the projected funding for the appropriation is \$1,317.9 million from regular resources and \$1,365 million from cost recovery from other resources;

9. *Notes*, in addition to the appropriation of \$2,682.9 million, the projected funding for the institutional budget of \$55.3 million from other resources, subject to the receipt of contributions to other resources;

10. *Also notes*, within special purpose activities, the projected utilization of resources for private sector fundraising, for which budgets will be submitted for consideration and approval on an annual basis by the Executive Board at its first regular session;

11. *Requests* the Executive Director to:

(a) Continue to provide actual financial information in the format of the integrated resource plan and to assess performance against the integrated budget in the annual report of the Executive Director to the Executive Board;

(b) Submit to the Executive Board, for annual approval, an updated integrated resource plan at its second regular session, following review of the financial projections on which it is based;

12. *Requests* UNICEF, in conjunction with the midterm review of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, to present a midterm review of the integrated resource plan and the integrated budget.

*Second regular session  
10 September 2021*

## **2021/20**

### **Private Fundraising and Partnerships: financial report for the year ended 31 December 2020**

#### *The Executive Board*

1. *Takes note* of the Private Fundraising and Partnerships: financial report for the year ended 31 December 2020 ([E/ICEF/2021/AB/L.8](#));

2. *Requests* UNICEF to present an update on its strategic approach to innovative financing, including planned investments and resource mobilization targets, at the first regular session of 2022.

*Second regular session  
10 September 2021*

## Annex II

### **Report of the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP held on 27 May 2021<sup>a</sup>**

1. The President of the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS opened the virtual meeting by announcing the theme of the 2021 JMB: “QCPR and UNDS reform in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic; what has happened in the last 12 months since the last JMB.” She welcomed the Presidents of the Executive Boards of UNICEF, UN-Women and the World Food Programme, the Deputy Secretary-General as a guest speaker, as well as the principals and deputies of the participating agencies.

2. In her opening address, the Deputy Secretary-General noted that the JMB was a well-timed opportunity to follow-up on the discussion within the ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment and to consider actions that would be needed from the six entities and their Executive Boards in supporting the delivery of the 2030 Agenda. She reiterated the excellent progress collectively made over the past year by the UN development system (UNDS), especially in the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19. She noted that the response to the pandemic had been a litmus test for the development system and a success.

3. The Deputy Secretary-General highlighted that the coordination role given to the Resident Coordinator (RC) and the programming for the UN country teams (UNCTs) for the 2030 Agenda has been a great impetus for the system to do more for the recovery from COVID-19. She cautioned, however, that the pandemic was far from over and there was a need to step up collective action as a system in support of delivering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She outlined seven areas in the review of the RC system where the attention of entities and the support of the Executive Boards was needed:

*i. Developing new Strategic Plans for 2022–2025* – she noted that this is a critical opportunity to strengthen the alignment of the business models of agencies, funds and programmes and the programming approaches to the reform, focusing on SDGs and the principle of “leaving no one behind.”

*ii. Funding to support integrated work and accelerate SDG implementation* – the Deputy Secretary-General stressed the major need for integrated approaches to be backed up by more unearmarked and flexible funding from Member States, with the view to support pooled funding arrangements, as called for in the Funding Compact.

*iii. Aligning agencies’ programmes and Cooperation Frameworks* – the Deputy Secretary-General emphasized that despite many improvements made in the last 12 months, attention must now be focused on their implementation, noting the need for closer collaboration in the process of developing common system-wide measures to assess contributions by the entities to the SDGs and to use common platforms like UN INFO.

*iv. Enhancing the principle of dual accountability of the new RC independent system, both to the entities and to the Secretary-General* – the Deputy Secretary-General noted that all six agencies covered by the JMB are among the eighteen entities that have formalized reporting requirements among their representatives and the RCs as part of their performance and appraisal systems. At the same time, there are a number of reports from the RCs about country representatives from across the system not engaging proactively in this process. She further added that there is a need for

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<sup>a</sup> This report has not been edited by UNICEF.

clear messages and direction by the entities and their governing bodies to the country level to that effect, in line with the requirements that have been set out in the internal guidance provided by the country-level Management and Accountability Framework.

v. *Advancing system-wide approaches* – strengthening system-wide approaches at the regional level, including the rollout of regional collaborative platforms under the leadership of the Deputy Secretary-General, the UNDP regional director and the regional commissions executive secretaries as vice-chairs, is a positive new development with important implications for entities' regional offices.

vi. *Improving efficiency* – the six entities have a crucial role to play in achieving efficiency through common business services and premises and good progress has been made so far. The Deputy Secretary-General encouraged the Executive Boards to continue to deepen the dialogue with entities regarding efficiencies, including those coming from single entities or generated bilaterally.

vii. *Continuing support for the RC system and UNDS reform* – more is needed to ensure strong and consistent messages at all levels in support of the RC system and UNDS reform. Also, more work is needed by individual entities to ensure familiarity with and understanding of the obligations and expectations, ensuring that the RC benefits from the right combination of accountability and incentives.

4. The Deputy Secretary-General also highlighted that, three years into the reform, the improvements that have been generated by an independent, impartial and empowered RC system can be clearly seen, alongside a new generation of UNCTs. However, there were messages from the Member States pointing to the significant gap between ambition and reality, expectations and deliverables of reform. Therefore, all options should be explored to ensure that the right accountability and incentives are in place to close that gap.

5. Finally, the Deputy Secretary-General expressed gratitude to the six agencies for their engagement, commitment and support, especially in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has shown that the investments in repositioning the UNDS are very fruitful.

6. In his introduction to the topic of the JMB, the President of the Executive Board of WFP emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic is a defining global crisis with devastating health and socio-economic consequences. He also noted that the major priority moving forward must be preventing famine and addressing food insecurity as a primary means to build resilience to shocks. The pandemic has already created the largest disruption in education in history with millions of students experiencing interruptions in learning and subsequent missed meals, impacting longer term skill development and economic prospects. The pandemic also rolled back progress on gender equality, health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, unpaid care and domestic work, gender-based violence, and the overall achievement of the SDGs. The President of the Executive Board of WFP further noted that there has never been more need for unity and cohesiveness across the UNDS. Against this backdrop, the President invited the participants to reflect on the lessons learned from the pandemic and the ways in which the agencies, funds and programmes can leverage the QCPR (Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review), the common agenda and the UNDS reform to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

7. The UNOPS Executive Director mentioned that although the pandemic has put to the test the agency's ability to respond to the challenges and needs of its partners, UNOPS was able to quickly adapt to the changing realities and continued to provide support to its partners, including longer-term solutions towards a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery. This ability to mobilize quickly was rooted in the demand-driven, self-financed business model of UNOPS. In a short time, the agency

signed agreements for some 900 millions USD in projects in support of the COVID-19 response. The Executive Director provided the example of the Idai Recovery Project in Zimbabwe, implemented in collaboration with FAO, IOM, UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO, and of the National Resilience Programme in Bangladesh, where the agency delivered quality and cost-effective solutions for its partners, in partnership with the Government, UNDP and UN-Women. She highlighted the Idai Recovery Project as an example of collaborative work with other sister agencies in “delivering as one” to address the immediate and medium-term recovery needs of countries.

8. Concurring with the previous speakers, the UNDP Administrator noted that the UNDS did mobilize its full capacity across 131 UNCTs as never before to support countries in response to the pandemic. UNDP was entrusted by the Secretary-General, in close coordination with the Deputy Secretary-General as the technical lead for the UN socio-economic response to COVID-19, working closely with the newly empowered and independent RC system but also with the sister agencies within the wider system of the UNCTs. The framework covers integrated priorities, including strengthened health systems, social protection, jobs, livelihoods, macroeconomic and social cohesion. The Administrator mentioned the willingness of many countries to address emerging challenges with new standing and focus, and the readiness to invest in an accelerated pace of change through digitalization, and investing in a green economy.

9. He noted that UNDP had developed a green recovery pathway together with UNEP, UNCTAD, ILO and FAO to ensure that countries receive the best possible support from the system, be it in energy transition, climate adaptation and nature-based solutions. Also, new mechanisms are being developed to address the challenges of crushing debts that countries face. The Administrator further highlighted that accelerated progress towards a digital green future where no one is left behind will be UNDP’s priority during the next Strategic Plan period, as it has been during the pandemic.

10. Highlighting the pandemic’s painful economic consequences on children and their families, the UNICEF Executive Director acknowledged the UNDS’ central role in providing an inclusive and sustainable recovery for all. UNICEF joined 11 agencies and two international NGOs to maintain a steady flow of affordable personal protective equipment, to keep people, including frontline workers safe. From procurement to quality assurance, from packaging to transportation, the UN Procurement Hub in Copenhagen led this effort, which resulted in delivery of over 140 thousand metric tons of supplies to 173 countries. Through the COVAX facility, UNICEF was working with other agencies, governments, transportation logistics organizations and the pharmaceutical industry to support the shipment of 75 million vaccine doses to 125 participating countries.

11. UNICEF also worked with other agencies to support long-term economic recovery through innovative social protection programmes. This joint work has expanded the coverage of national social protection programmes for over 47 million households in 128 countries.

12. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director warned the participants that the impact of the pandemic has rolled back progress for women, girls, and young people, including access to sexual and reproductive health services. Gender-based violence has increased and the pandemic has disrupted contraceptive use for millions of women around the world, increasing the proportion of unintended pregnancies, particularly in low-income countries. In coordination with the United Nations country teams, UNFPA has developed innovative approaches to ensure the continuity of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services and reproductive rights through the pandemic, addressing harmful practices and gender-based violence,

ensuring the supply of contraceptives and reproductive health commodities, as well as the provision of personal protective equipment.

13. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director informed that, in a recent internal survey, UNFPA country offices reported that UNDS reforms had provided a solid foundation for UNCTs to facilitate timely and effective responses to the pandemic. RCs are seen as playing a key role in enabling the effective and inclusive participation of UN entities in response to the priorities of women and girls.

14. On other aspects of reform, the Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA specified that about 70 percent of the agency's country offices reported some forms of efficiency gains by undertaking joint procurement with other agencies and entering long-term agreements for service providers. At the same time, given the need to accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs and Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Deputy Executive Director highlighted the importance of flexible funding by Member States as well as adhering to their commitments in the Funding Compact.

15. The WFP Deputy Executive Director commended the manner in which the agencies responded to the COVID-19 crisis as one of the best examples of UN coordination, unity and cohesion. At the same time, he questioned why coordination had not been achieved prior to the crisis. In his view, the pandemic generated multiple lessons about developing and implementing socio-economic responses with partners and system interoperability, calling for "building forward together" and focusing on the multi-dimensional and layered needs of the vulnerable, and developing a joint understanding of the drivers of that vulnerability. He stated that none of these needs can be addressed through the mandate of one single agency. Joint analysis, action and programming on health, nutrition, and social protection were seen as safeguards against future shocks that would protect the development gains and the investments that have been made and would build long term sustainable solutions.

16. Recalling that even before the pandemic hit, the world was not close to achieving the goals and aspirations of the Beijing Platform for Action, the UN-Women Deputy Executive Director underlined the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women and girls, widening gender gaps. She stressed that while the pandemic cast a light on existing inequalities, it also created new problems, with women's increased caregiving responsibilities, therefore making it difficult for them to participate in the labour force, and further sharpening digital inequalities. Against this backdrop, working jointly with UN partners and building on its triple mandate, UN-Women has sought to advance a coherent and integrated focus on gender equality in its response to the pandemic.

17. The Deputy Executive Director of UN-Women highlighted three ways in which UN-Women had played an important role in this process: *i.* advancing thought leadership and shaping the discourse in the UN system on the impact of the pandemic on women and girls; *ii.* gathering, publishing and using data regarding the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women and girls and reflecting this in socio-economic response plans; *iii.* including both gender markers and financial targets for gender programming within the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) and the UN Trust Fund for Response and Recovery, having a crucial impact on joint programming and on including a gender lens in the responses.

18. The President of the Executive Board of WFP was pleased with WFP's alignment with the UN common frameworks and the continuing promotion by the agency of innovation as part of the reform work, with the view to align itself with the priorities of the host countries and avoid redundancies among the mandates of various agencies. At the same time, he expressed concern about the massive challenges that lay ahead, with 270 million people around the world facing hunger. He stressed the focus on



strengthening Member States' resilience to shocks, which allows them to respond in an individual capacity when a crisis arises.

19. In their comments, Member States thanked the Heads of agencies and the Deputy Executive Directors for providing updates on their collective efforts to address the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic under very difficult circumstances. They generally approved of the cooperative work done through the crisis and encouraged these efforts to continue and to be replicated across the system to build long-term resilience, accelerate SDG implementation and "leave no one behind."

20. Speaking as a donor, one speaker highlighted that the pandemic had shown how intertwined global challenges are, reflecting the need for multilateral solutions and creating much-needed momentum for a coordinated global crisis response, and the importance of strong partnerships to achieve this. He thanked the agencies for their strong embrace of the conclusions of the 2020 QCPR. Moving forward, he stressed the need to persist with a coordinated response and expand it to other areas, namely: *i.* climate change adaptation and mitigation, and nature-based solutions; *ii.* a system-wide digital strategy for the post-pandemic world; *iii.* full gender recovery from the effects of COVID-19; and *iv.* further operationalizing the "leaving no one behind" principle. He also suggested these priorities should be reflected in the new Strategic Plans.

21. Some delegations took the opportunity to highlight other priorities which, from their perspective, were important in order to reverse the adverse effects of the pandemic. These included generalizing the distribution of vaccines, promoting innovative financing mechanisms and supporting local economies.

22. Another speaker called for continued efforts to enhance harmonization between agencies' activities within the Cooperation Frameworks. It was noted that close to 40 percent of UN entities have yet to take action in harmonizing their agency-specific programming in line with the Cooperation Framework guidance. Similarly, agencies were encouraged to further enhance collaboration to meet the humanitarian-development-peace nexus through more joint development activities, particularly in conflict-affected and fragile settings.

23. The need to further strengthen multilateral cooperation along with South-South, triangular, and North-South cooperation was also mentioned by the delegations.

24. Noting that 47 percent of UN agencies have not changed the job description of their country representatives to make it clear that they now report to the RC, delegations urged agencies to do so, as well as to take further steps to ensure that the leadership of the RC is fully respected and supported at the country level.

25. Looking ahead to the implementation of the 2020 QCPR, and through the example of the Procurement Hub which worked through the COVID-19 pandemic to support 436 organizations with emergency transport, personal protective equipment (PPE) and other supplies, delegations wanted to see joint programming increasing in the future. In addition, agencies were encouraged to prioritize the connection on data and statistics with the view to improve and accelerate collective planning and implementation.

26. To maintain the momentum on UNDS reform, the six agencies were encouraged to continue to advance their reform commitments in order to ensure harmonized and efficient policy, programmatic and common approaches. This includes joint programming efforts which bring together the collective expertise of the UNDS to address country needs and priorities.

27. Partnering with international financial institutions was also stressed as a way to help advance achievement of the SDGs. Delegations found that the examples taken from country responses once more highlighted the potential for cooperation with these institutions through data sharing and cross-organizational policy approaches.

28. Reflecting further on the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women and girls, one delegation highlighted the importance of gender data and the support for countries to access funding to address gender statistics.

29. Noting the pivotal role of multilateralism and solidarity, some delegations highlighted that the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions must continue to be the overarching goal of the agencies' work. Their policies must continue to be aligned with the QCPR, the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, while keeping the focus on countries in special situations.

30. Delegations recognized the importance of flexible funding and core contributions, the deficit of which is affecting the capacity of the UN system to respond to the pandemic and fulfill the mandate to reposition the UNDS.

31. In response to the comments and questions by Member States, the UNOPS Executive Director referred to her role as Chair of the High Level Committee on Management (HLCM). She explained the work and the purpose of the Committee to ensure better platforms for interagency collaboration, simplify business practices and become more efficient. The Committee is consensus-based and proved to be quite efficient through the pandemic. It also aims to build more transparent relationships to enable Member States to hold the agencies accountable and help them manage expectations from the outset. The Committee also focuses on building strategic partnerships to achieve the SDGs.

32. The UNOPS Executive Director reaffirmed the agency's full support for the UN reform. As a non-programmatic, self-financed agency, UNOPS highlighted strong demand for its services and emphasized transparency, added value, flexibility and the quality and speed of its services, elements which, the Executive Director mentioned, will be incorporated into the agency's Strategic Plan for 2022–2025.

33. The UNDP Administrator noted the multifaceted dimensions of COVID-19 while the agency was working actively to understand the impact of the pandemic, identify where the vulnerabilities were the greatest and the setbacks most profound. He stated that UNDP was reflecting deeply on the lessons learned on how to best use the analyses that emerge from the assessments and data that UNDP generates nationally and internationally, in order to target areas where UNDP can bring the greatest impact.

34. Referring to the comments regarding the priorities for the next Strategic Plans, the UNDP Administrator explained that the imperative of green recovery will be quite central to the way the agency will be moving forward. Similarly, poverty eradication, social protection and digitalization will be essential to support economic recovery, while the QCPR, the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda will serve as the template for implementation. The Administrator further added that national ownership remains a reference point for UNDP.

35. On the topic of UNDS reform, the Administrator clarified that UNDP had revised the terms of reference for its Resident Representatives very early on, to explicitly refer to the core elements of the Cooperation Framework in UNDP's work. He further highlighted that the principle of mutual accountability must be strengthened on the basis of implementing the Management and Accountability Framework. The Administrator invited Member States to exercise due care in ensuring that agencies, funds and programmes can maintain their accountability in the context of the UNDS

reform and to their Boards, while keeping in mind that the reform narrative must not only focus on the mechanics of coordination, but on the actual impact that it generates.

36. Continuing on the theme of UN reform and the Strategic Plan, the UNICEF Executive Director mentioned three priority areas that her agency will be focusing on: *i.* the adaptation needs of climate change; *ii.* digitalization for education; and *iii.* nutrition. She further added that the UNICEF country programmes are being fully aligned with the Cooperation Frameworks.

37. The UNICEF Executive Director also spoke about the efficiencies that the agencies can generate following the UNDS reform, and which can bring great advantages, including by investing them into country programmes.

38. Acknowledging the value of inter-agency cooperation on procurement activities, based on the experience of the joint response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Executive Director of UNICEF highlighted that the UN system can be a trusted procurement source and that this is an area in which the UNDS can grow.

39. Responding to the Member States' comments regarding the interoperability of data with the view to improve and accelerate collective planning and implementation, the UNICEF Executive Director pointed to the critical need of flexible funding for agencies to be able to realize such interoperability and fund platforms like the UN INFO data system.

40. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director confirmed that the entity's country programmes are fully aligned with the Cooperation Frameworks and the country representatives are evaluated against the Management and Accountability Framework as a measure of their performance. He reiterated the agency's commitment to joint programming, noting the significant increase in funding UNFPA had received from inter-agency pooled funds, a trend which is foreseen to increase in the years to come. He also reiterated the importance of non-earmarked and flexible funding to promote joint programming by the agencies.

41. The UNFPA Deputy Executive Director concurred with the delegations mentioning the importance of sex-disaggregated data for evidence-based planning, including in the context of the ongoing global health crisis. He noted that UNFPA has established a COVID-19 Population Vulnerability Dashboard, providing data disaggregated at the national and sub-national levels and updated on a daily basis.

42. Referring to the next generation of Strategic Plans, the Deputy Executive Director of WFP reiterated their importance in reflecting UNDS reform in a well-coordinated manner, noting the importance of creating new strategic plans aligned with the 2020 QCPR and the Cooperation Frameworks. He also emphasized the role played by the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and its impact on resilience and preparedness, as well as the need for shock-responsive social-protection systems to prepare countries for future crises.

43. The Deputy Executive Director of WFP emphasized the Management and Accountability Framework as a crucial foundation to ensuring mutual accountability and highlighted the WFP's strong engagement in this regard.

44. He also emphasized the importance of incorporating lessons learned from the pandemic into the understanding of the RCs role with heightened responsibility to lead and as a point of cohesion.

45. Recalling the 2008 financial crisis, the Deputy Executive Director of UN-Women pointed to the COVID-19 pandemic as a truly integrated crisis on many fronts. She cautioned of the danger of more inequalities arising from it, which is already being seen in the unequal access to vaccines. She further observed the real possibility of societies looking quite different in the aftermath of the pandemic, with

widened gender gaps and women no longer visible in leadership positions or participating fully in the economy.

46. The nature of this crisis is necessitating an unprecedented partnership approach which the agencies cannot accomplish alone. The UN-Women Deputy Executive Director mentioned several examples of UN-Women working together with other agencies in response to the crisis such as: *i.* the partnership with UNFPA on the Spotlight Initiative to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls; *ii.* the collaboration with UNDP on the Gender Policy Tracker monitoring global gender policy measures to tackle the COVID-19 crisis; and *iii.* the work with the WHO on disaggregating data on COVID-19 cases by sex and age.

47. The UN-Women Deputy Executive Director added that these partnerships will have to extend beyond the UN system in order to be successful. The UN-Women Deputy Executive Director cited the Generation Equality Forum as one such platform for external partnerships, bringing together not only the UN system, but also leveraging partnerships with civil society, the private sector and international financial institutions. In addition, she mentioned the opportunity to influence multilateral processes, such as the G20, COP26 and G7 to ensure that the SDGs are at the center of those discussions.

48. The UN-Women Deputy Executive Director noted the extremely limited funding for gender equality in the UN system, with less than two percent of resources spent actually going specifically towards advancing gender equality. She noted that this underscores the need for an integrated approach to ensure that gender is not only part of the Strategic Plans but also of joint programming.

49. In his final remarks, the Vice-President of the UN-Women Executive Board and moderator of the session's interactive discussion, underscored that moving towards the achievement of the SDGs will require significant collaborative efforts. Acknowledging the added burden on the UN system, he recognized the collaborative work by the agencies to deliver results under very challenging circumstances. Looking ahead at the development of the entities' Strategic Plans, the moderator underlined the importance of people-centered, gender-responsive and human rights-based approaches, while addressing the interlinkage between health, trade, finance and economic and social development.

50. In closing of the meeting, the President of the Executive Board of UNICEF echoed the Member States' messages to the agencies, encouraging them to work together more closely, while at the same time noting the progress already achieved as shown in the examples discussed during the meeting. In addition, he stressed the importance of the agencies' unique mandates and comparative advantages, each contributing their own innovative ideas, talents and resources to the collective effort. He found that, while the pandemic revealed new ways of working together, the work and examples that were discussed were vital and encouraging to solving the world's interrelated problems.

