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Report of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund on the work of its annual session of 2021

(1–4 June 2021)*

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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/2021/9) for the session.
2. 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

3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. 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.

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

15. 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.

16. 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.

17. 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.

18. 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).

19. 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.

20. 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.

21. 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.

22. 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.

23. 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.

24. 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.

25. 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.

26. 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

27. 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.

28. 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.

29. 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.

30. 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.

31. 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.

32. 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.

33. 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.

34. 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.

35. 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.

36. 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.

37. 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.

38. 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.

39. 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.

40. 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.

41. 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.

42. 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.

43. 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.

44. 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.

45. 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.

46. 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.

47. 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.

48. 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.

49. 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.

50. 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.

51. 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.

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

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

53. 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.

54. 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.

55. 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.

56. 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.

57. 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.

58. 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.

59. 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"

60. 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.

61. 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.

62. 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.

63. 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

64. 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.

65. 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.

66. 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.

67. 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.

68. 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.

69. 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.

70. 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

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

72. 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.

73. 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.

74. 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.

75. 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.

76. 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.

77. 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.

78. 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.

79. 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.

80. 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.

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

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

82. 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.

83. 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”.

84. 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.

85. 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.

86. 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.

87. 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

88. 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.

89. 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.

90. 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.

91. 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.

92. 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.

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

(b) Extensions of ongoing country programmes

94. 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.

95. 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.

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

F. Evaluation reports and management responses

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

97. 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](#)).

98. 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.

99. 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.

100. 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.

101. 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.

102. 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

103. 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](#)).

104. 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.

105. 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.

106. 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.

107. 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.

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

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

109. 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](#)).

110. 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.

111. 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 whistleblower 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.

112. 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.

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

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

114. 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.

115. 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.

116. 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.

117. 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.

118. 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.

119. 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.

120. 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.

121. 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.

122. 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.

123. 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.

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

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

125. 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.

126. 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.

127. 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.

128. 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.

129. 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.

130. 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".

131. 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.

132. 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

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

134. 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.

135. 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.

136. 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.

137. 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.

138. 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.

139. 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.

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

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

141. 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.

142. 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.

143. 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.

144. 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

145. 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.

146. 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.

147. 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.

148. 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.

149. 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.

150. 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.

151. 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

152. 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

153. The Executive Board adopted decisions [E/ICEF/2021/L.6](#) through [E/ICEF/2021/L.13](#) (see annex).

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

154. 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.

155. 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.

156. 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.

157. 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.

158. 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.

159. 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.

160. 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.

161. 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.

162. 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.

163. 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.

164. 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.

165. 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.

Annex

Decisions adopted by the Executive Board at its annual session of 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*
